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## DEVELOPMENT BULLETIN

# 82

No. 82 February 2021 Editors: Pamela Thomas and Meg Keen

# PERSPECTIVES ON PACIFIC SECURITY: FUTURE CURRENTS



## THEMES

- Security Governance and Collaboration
- Geopolitics of Pacific Security
- Food, Environment and Livelihood Security
- Human, Health and Gender Security
- Multiplying Security Issues in Pacific Cities
- Media Security and Knowledge Sharing



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## The Development Bulletin

This is the 82nd issue of the Development Bulletin. Since 1988 it has been the journal of the Development Studies Network, currently based at the Crawford School of Public Policy at the Australian National University. It is an occasional publication providing at least one issue a year. Each issue focuses on a specific, topical development theme providing a multi-disciplinary perspective on development activities, theories, impacts, teaching and research.

This issue is produced in close collaboration with ANU's Australian Pacific Security College and brings together the security opinions, experiences, and suggestions of Pacific Island leaders, Pacific Island people, global security specialists, environmentalists, health professionals, economists, journalists, farmers, agronomists and academics. Safe and secure reading!

## Free download

This issue of Development Bulletin, together with 56 previous issues, is available for free download and can be freely copied and used on condition that the source is acknowledged. In addition to back issues of Development Bulletin, our website also has a collection of 87 papers on women and gender issues in the Pacific. Many are written by Pacific Island women.

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## Contacts

Managing Editor: Dr Pamela Thomas  
Development Bulletin  
Resources, Environment and Development Program (RE&D)  
Crawford School of Public Policy  
The Australian National University  
Canberra, ACT 2600, Australia

P 61 2 61258257  
M 0412945655  
E [pamela.thomas@anu.edu.au](mailto:pamela.thomas@anu.edu.au)

## Cover photos

Front: Carteret atolls off Bougainville where people are “the world’s first climate refugees.” Some have already been resettled on Bougainville. (Photo: Ben Bohane. ANU)

Back: Atoll vegetation, Carteret. (Photo: Ben Bohane)

# DEVELOPMENT BULLETIN

Issue 82 February 2021

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## PERSPECTIVES ON PACIFIC SECURITY: FUTURE CURRENTS

This special security issue of Development Bulletin is produced by the Development Studies Network in close collaboration with, and support from, the Australia Pacific Security College, ANU. Thirty respected Pacific Island and international academics, development and security professionals provide a wide-ranging exploration of the unique and urgent security needs of Pacific Island nations. Different perspectives are discussed here in a collection of concise papers which consider current and future security needs in the rapidly changing cultural, environmental and political economies of the Pacific. These include cyber, media and economic security, food and environmental security, health and personal security with a strong focus on the security needs of women and children.

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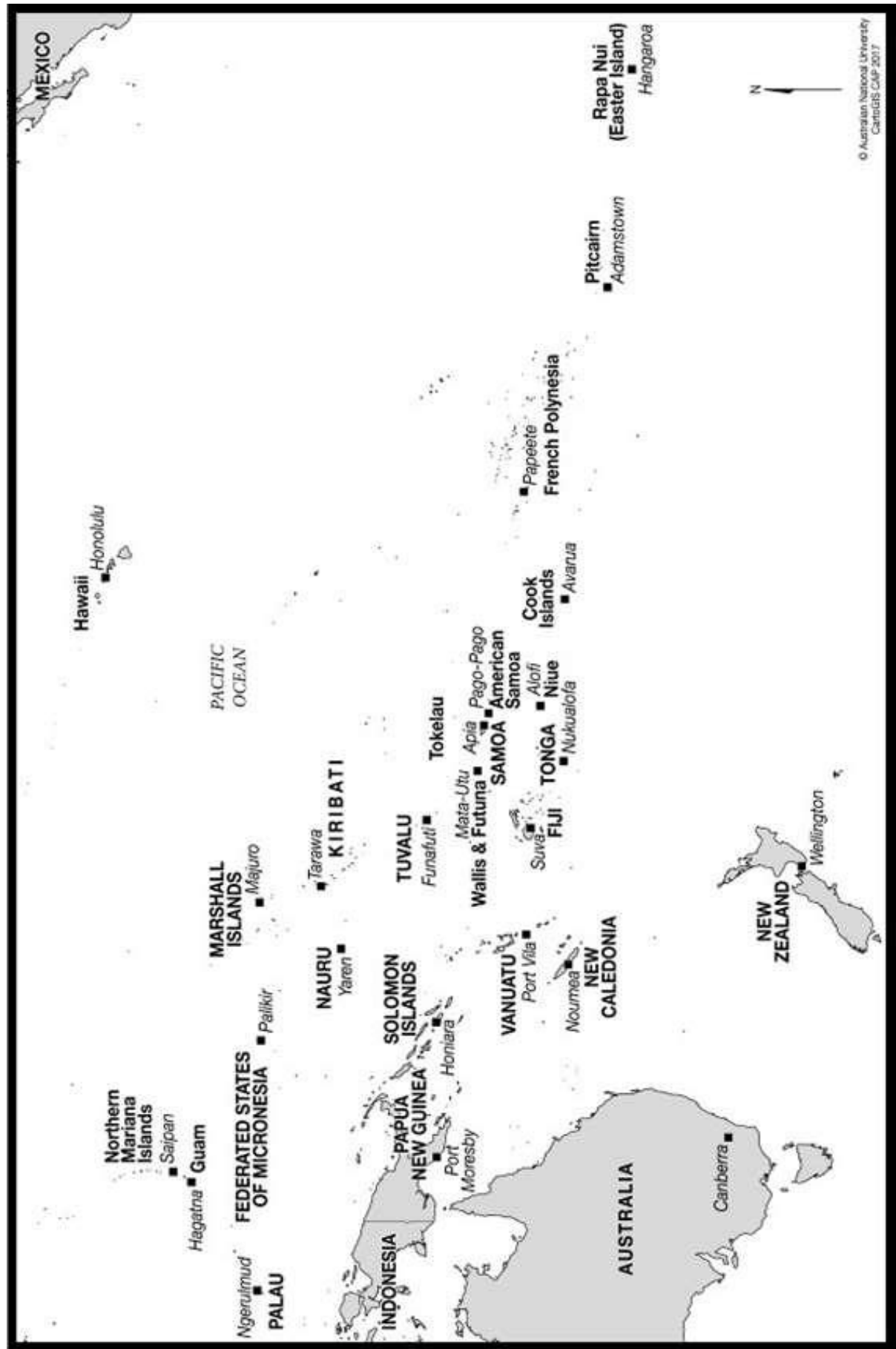
# Acronyms

<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank
<b>AFP</b>	Australian Federal Police
<b>ANU</b>	The Australian National University
<b>APEC</b>	Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation
<b>AOSIS</b>	Alliance of Small Island States
<b>ASPI</b>	Australian Strategic Policy Institute
<b>ATH</b>	Amalgamated Telecom Holdings
<b>AVBE</b>	adapted virtual barter exchange
<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
<b>CERT</b>	Computer Emergency Response Team
<b>CNMI</b>	Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
<b>COP</b>	Conference of the Parties (to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change)
<b>CRC</b>	Convention on the Rights of the Child
<b>CSP</b>	Cyber Safety Pasifika
<b>DFAT</b>	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
<b>DPA</b>	Department of Pacific Affairs at ANU (formerly known as the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia (SSGM) program)
<b>DFAT</b>	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
<b>EEZ</b>	Exclusive Economic Zone (prescribed by the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea)
<b>ESCAP</b>	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EVAW</b>	ending violence against women
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization
<b>FAO-RAP</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization-Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
<b>FEMM</b>	(PIF) Forum Economic Ministers Meeting
<b>FFA</b>	(PIF) Forum Fisheries Agency
<b>FSC</b>	Family Support Centres
<b>FSM</b>	Federated States of Micronesia
<b>FSVU</b>	Family and Sexual Violence Units
<b>FWCC</b>	Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre
<b>GCF</b>	Green Climate Fund
<b>GDS</b>	Global Demographic Survey
<b>GoPNG</b>	Government of Papua New Guinea
<b>GSMA</b>	GSM Association (referred to as 'the GSMA' or Global System for Mobile Communications, originally Groupe Spécial Mobile)
<b>GBV</b>	Gender Based Violence
<b>HBS</b>	Heinrich Böll Stiftung (Washington DC)
<b>HDI</b>	Human Development Index
<b>HIES</b>	Household Income Expenditure Survey
<b>ICCPR</b>	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
<b>ICJ</b>	International Court of Justice
<b>IDI</b>	Inclusive Development International (NGO)
<b>ILGSSE</b>	International Leading Group on Social and Solidarity Economy
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IMO</b>	International Maritime Organization
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-government Organisation
<b>IUU</b>	Illegal, Unrecorded and Unregulated
<b>IWDA</b>	International Women’s Development Agency
<b>LMMA</b>	Locally-Managed Marine Area (Network)
<b>MARPOL</b>	The International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (adopted 1973)
<b>MDGs</b>	Millennium Development Goals – eight international development goals for the year 2015 following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000, replaced by 17 SDGs.

<b>NCD</b>	National Capital District (PNG)
<b>NCDs</b>	Non Communicable Diseases
<b>NGO</b>	Non-government Organisation
<b>NUA</b>	New Urban Agenda
<b>ODI</b>	Overseas Development Institute (UK)
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PaCSON</b>	Pacific Cyber Security Operational Network
<b>PDF</b>	Pacific Disability Forum
<b>PPDP-R</b>	Pacific Police Development Program-Regional
<b>PPDVP</b>	Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Programme
<b>PHAMA</b>	Pacific Horticultural and Agricultural Market Access
<b>PICs</b>	Pacific Island Countries
<b>PICP</b>	Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police
<b>PICTs</b>	Pacific Island Countries and Territories
<b>PIDP</b>	Pacific Island Development Program
<b>PIF</b>	Pacific Islands Forum
<b>PIFS</b>	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat
<b>PISFCC</b>	Pacific Island Students Fighting Climate Change
<b>PNG</b>	Papua New Guinea
<b>PPDP-R</b>	Pacific Police Development Program-Regional (AFP)
<b>PRIF</b>	Pacific Regional Infrastructure Facility
<b>PSIDS</b>	Pacific Small Island Developing States
<b>PTCN</b>	Pacific Transnational Crime Network
<b>PTCCC</b>	Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre
<b>RAMSI</b>	Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands
<b>RMI</b>	Republic of the Marshall Islands
<b>RNZ</b>	Radio New Zealand
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals—17 goals following the MDGs (up to 2015) and part of a wider Agenda for Sustainable Development for 2030 (UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1)
<b>SIDS</b>	Small Island Developing States
<b>SLRC</b>	Samoa Law Reform Commission
<b>SPC</b>	South Pacific Commission
<b>SPC</b>	Secretariat of the Pacific Community
<b>SPREP</b>	South Pacific Regional Environment Programme
<b>SSE</b>	Social and Solidarity Economy
<b>TCUs</b>	Transnational Crime Units
<b>TSOC</b>	Transnational, Serious and Organised Crime
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNEP</b>	United Nations Environment Programme
<b>UNESCAP</b>	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations (International) Children's (Emergency) Fund
<b>UNODC</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
<b>UNTFSSSE</b>	UN Inter-Agency Taskforce on Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE)
<b>VAW</b>	Violence Against Women
<b>VfC</b>	Voice for Change
<b>WASH</b>	Water, sanitation and hygiene
<b>WCPF</b>	Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WHRDs</b>	women human rights defenders
<b>WRI</b>	World Resources Institute



# Map of the Pacific



# Boe Declaration on Regional Security



## FORUM LEADERS:

Recognising and reaffirming our endorsement of the Biketawa Declaration in the year 2000 and recalling the principles underpinning the Biketawa Declaration such as commitment to good governance, belief in the liberty of the individual under the law, upholding democratic processes and institutions and recognising the vulnerability of member countries to threats to their security; Recalling our vision and values for the Pacific under the Framework for Pacific Regionalism, as a region of 'peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity so that all Pacific people can lead free, healthy and productive lives';

Recognising our endorsement of the 'Blue Pacific' identity to drive collective action in support of our vision under the Framework for Pacific Regionalism;

Recalling our agreement at the 48th Forum Leaders' Meeting in Apia, Samoa, to build on the Biketawa Declaration and other Forum related security declarations and agreements as the foundation for strategic future regional responses;

Recognising the importance we placed on an expanded concept of security inclusive of human security, humanitarian assistance, prioritising environmental security, and regional cooperation in building resilience to disasters and climate change, including through regional cooperation and support;

Respecting the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of Forum Members; and;

Recognising the need to strengthen regional security cooperation and collective action through the assertion of Our Will and the voices of Our Pacific Peoples.

## HEREBY DECLARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. (i) We reaffirm that climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific and our commitment to progress the implementation of the Paris Agreement;
2. (ii) We recognise an increasingly complex regional security environment driven by multifaceted security challenges, and a dynamic geopolitical environment leading to an increasingly crowded and complex region;

3. (iii) We affirm our stewardship of the Blue Pacific and aspire to strengthen and enhance our capacity to pursue our collective security interests given our responsibility to sustain our Pacific peoples and our resources;
4. (iv) We respect and assert the sovereign right of every Member to conduct its national affairs free of external interference and coercion;
5. (v) We reaffirm the right of Members to individually and collectively address security issues and concerns;
6. (vi) We reaffirm the importance of the rules-based international order founded on the UN Charter, adherence to relevant international law and resolution of international disputes by peaceful means;
7. (vii) We affirm an expanded concept of security which addresses the wide range of security issues in the region, both traditional and non-traditional, with an increasing emphasis on:
  1. Human Security, including humanitarian assistance, to protect the rights, health and prosperity of Pacific people;
  2. Environmental and resource security;
  3. Transnational crime; and,
  4. Cybersecurity, to maximise protections and opportunities for Pacific infrastructure and peoples in the digital age.
8. (viii) We recognise that national security impacts on regional security, and therefore commit to strengthening our respective national security approaches by:
  1. developing our national security strategies; and,
  2. strengthening national security capacity including through training.
9. (ix) We commit to strengthening the existing regional security architecture inclusive of regional law enforcement secretariats and regional organisations to:
  1. account for the expanded concept of security;
  2. identify and address emerging security challenges;
  3. improve coordination among existing security mechanisms;
  4. facilitate open dialogue and strengthened information sharing;
  5. further develop early warning mechanisms;
  6. support implementation;
  7. promote regional security analysis, assessment and advice; and,
  8. engage and cooperate, where appropriate, with international organisations, partners and other relevant stakeholders.
10. (x) We commit to continuing regular Leaders level discussions on the expanded concept of security as part of securing our Blue Pacific.

*Nauru, September 2018*



## Perspectives of Pacific security: An Introduction

*Pamela Thomas and Meg Keen, The Australian National University*

Regional and national security challenges are mounting in the Pacific Islands and demanding new approaches to respond to them. Currently, COVID-19, climate change and geopolitics are adding to pre-existing concerns related to human, environmental and traditional security. This special issue considers how Pacific Islanders are navigating through these pressures and charting new ways to secure their resources, food, health and way of life. The ways in which the Pacific manages these new and future security currents will affect development trajectories and the relationships critical to finding a 'Pacific Way' to safeguard culture, place and agency.

This special issue of the Development Bulletin draws on the Boe Declaration on Regional Security (page viii), and its expanded concept of security to frame our analyses and provide direction for improving long-term resilience. We examine fresh perspectives on security and the ways in which many security issues in the Pacific are interconnected and need to be addressed through collaborations across sectors and society – a 'whole of nation' and 'whole of region' approach. The importance of connectivity, inclusion and culture provides the foundation for most of the papers in this journal. While the Boe Declaration speaks of different types of security, it is acknowledged that they all overlap and interact, requiring a more systemic approach that takes us out of our harbours and onto uncharted waters.

This journal also marks the first year of ANU's Australia Pacific Security College which has supported this publication. The College is committed to creating platforms for collaboration and knowledge exchange to support a Pacific approach to the region's security. We hope this Special Edition with its collection of authors from the Pacific and those with long-term associations makes a significant contribution.

### Security governance and collaboration

In her paper, 'Security through a Pacific lens' Meg Keen examines the interplay between security challenges and emerging initiatives to better coordinate across countries and sectors – a key theme of the Boe Declaration. Competing geopolitical and national interests, evident in climate change negotiations, still need to be navigated and new alliances formed to advance Pacific interests. At the regional level, the cohesiveness of the security agenda is growing, but can 'falter if there are perceived threats to sovereignty' that affect information sharing and concerted action on transnational issues. Part of the challenge is the limited reach and resources of many governments to address pressing security issues. More could be done to leverage community groups and involve them in the security agenda.

The Boe Declaration encourages Pacific Island countries to develop national security strategies, which Tim George considers will equip governments to successfully handle national security issues – if they are realistic, the product of widespread consultation, and embedded in the cultural fabric. The need for security initiatives to have cultural integrity is taken up by Steven Ratuva in his examination of the newest security challenge, COVID-19, which is displacing attention to climate change and geopolitics. COVID-19, he writes, has reimagined the security landscape 'starkly revealing the fragility and lack of resilience of the neoliberal system'. The social solidarity economy (SSE), he maintains, is a key to survival with its foundation in recognition of ethical values which prioritise the wellbeing of people and planet over profit.

### The geopolitics of Pacific security

Girard, Amin and Watson raise the issue of climate change and the lack of connection between the major perpetrators and those in the PICs living with its negative effects. Climate change, they show, is exacerbating water and food insecurity in the

Pacific. They point out that PICs are often in situations where the actions of their geopolitical allies are in direct conflict with their security needs. James Batley reflects on the gap in the security approaches pursued by Australia and the Pacific region. Traditional partners are stepping up with new commitments and opportunities which can be leveraged by increasingly confident Pacific voices, but they will be selective.

Anna Powles reflects on the New Zealand ‘Pacific Reset’ and critically examines how identity narratives shape security engagements but also pose risks when the narratives of donors diverge from perceptions in the region. Just as Australia and New Zealand have increased their engagement with the region through their Pacific Step-Up (NZ) and Pacific Reset (Australia) policies, so too has China which is also creating a narrative about its Pacific associations as a regional player. Denghua Zhang outlines the ways in which PICs are relevant to China’s security and considers the prospects for China–Pacific security engagement. Although the PICs are distant from China, Zhang states, they are relevant to China’s geopolitical interests, and in China’s view, share development interests.

## Food, environment and livelihood

Securing access to nutritious food has always been a vital concern in Pacific Island countries as all the authors in this section stress. Mike Bourke writes of ‘famine foods’ – or food varieties that could withstand climatic shocks and maintain community food supply while Suliasi Vunibola discusses traditional and contemporary approaches to enhance food security, particularly in times of famine. Crimp and colleagues point out that subsistence food production provides a significant part of household nutrition and income in rural areas but there is a widespread deterioration in the quality of foods eaten as an increase in cheap, long-lasting store-bought food becomes more popular. With a positive note, Bourke states that there can be improvements in food security with the introduction of new food crops and hardier varieties that can withstand climate change. Changing demographics and demand also requires that food distribution systems be given more attention.

Crimp and colleagues consider the many factors transforming food systems including changing climates, demographics, trade and technology, and how an ‘all hazards, multi-sectoral approach’ which draws on local innovation will be needed to achieve resilient food systems. The papers indicate that across the Pacific there is considerable concern about the security of both ocean and coastal fish stocks. Joeli Veitiyaki writes:

Secure access to productive fish stocks is fundamental to sustaining Pacific livelihoods and on-going management of the region’s coastal resources is imperative for food security.

For transnational fisheries resources, such as tuna, a regional approach is logical but will require innovations in management practices to ensure responses are evidence-based, coordinated and enduring.

## Human, health and gender security

The Boe Declaration considers health as a core human security issue which, as the authors in this section show, requires critical consideration of power dynamics, and the interplay between policy and politics. Henry Ivarature points out, COVID-19 profoundly reconfigured human security relations between state and society in PNG with the enactment of new legislation that required citizens to momentarily forego democratic rights, liberties and freedoms in the interest of national security. While relations between state and society have been brought into focus during the pandemic, so have relationships across government. Nick Thomson discusses the new partnerships that COVID-19 has fostered among health, security and social protection agencies. An on-going concern in many of these papers is how health, gender and empowerment are tightly interwoven. Lilly Be’Soer’s personal reflection of the brutal treatment of women in the highlands of PNG makes chilling reading. But her way of addressing it provides hope with her stories of ‘home-grown organisations’ that provide women with ‘choices, empowerment and security’. However, government is still largely missing in action with NGOs remaining the ‘de facto’ leaders of change.

Be’Soer’s conclusions are supported by Philip Gibbs and Lorelle Yakam. They conclude that perpetrators of violence still face few repercussions as a result of policy and service gaps. Women are struggling to find secure places at home, in markets and at the voting booths; even accessing their traditional lands can be fraught – the currents of change that will provide greater security for Pacific women remain weak but will involve stronger NGO-government cooperation. To get forward momentum, Vijay Naidu argues analysis needs to move beyond its preoccupation with analysing the securitisation of the state and development agendas, and apply a human security lens which he believes has the potential to be a transformative concept through its emphasis on ‘partner-centred approaches’ and greater education and advocacy on issues which impinge on people and communities.

## Security issues in Pacific cities

Urbanisation is an increasingly obvious current of change affecting Pacific security as land competition escalates, informal settlements mushroom, and services and jobs fall far short of demand. Luke Kiddle and Paul Jones both consider the human security difficulties of Pacific Islanders living in informal settlements where floods, inadequate sanitation and water supplies, and poor housing undermine security. With the large and growing informal settlements on the fringes of most Pacific Island cities there is an urgent need to address the lack of urban planning and social tensions flowing from insecure land tenure, marginalised populations and elite politics. Jennifer Day highlights how new local networks and governance structures, including community associations, can strengthen urban environments, but considers that a patchwork of community initiatives cannot replace the need for a more coherent vision for Pacific cities and their management.



## Communication for security

Throughout this section authors stress the importance of sharing insights to new and emerging security trends, and holding Pacific leaders to account. Jay Caldwell describes the security priorities emerging from regional consultations across the region relating to a push for more capacity to shape national security agendas, to address pervasive non-communicable diseases and weak health systems, to mitigate climate and resources security issues, and combat growing cyber and transnational crime threats.

These papers recognise the politicisation of the media, and the need for press freedom to bring greater accountability to the security agenda. Steve Sharp, an experienced journalist in the Pacific, writes that:

there is an urgent need in the Pacific for recognisable, independent and credible media discourses on national security that are disaggregated from the noise of self-appointed influencers on social media.

He calls for better trained and more mature journalists. The Boe Declaration, he writes, is a recognition of shared security threats and by implication the need for coordinated security strategies to meet them. In his opinion ‘countering the security threats ... will rely on informed and vigilant publics’ but ‘the unwillingness of politicians and officials to engage in dialogue is undermining the media’s accountability role’. Amanda Watson critically assesses the telecommunication sector through a security lens. Mobile phones, she writes, are increasingly being used as the main channel to access information, yet networks are vulnerable on a number of fronts including the ownership monopolies, the susceptibility to severe weather events, and the growing incidence of cyber-crime. Cyber-security, she states, is an important area of concern and has been highlighted in the Boe Declaration as requiring greater emphasis.

## Policing and transnational security

Transnational crime is an important and increasing security threat for most PICs. Danielle Watson and colleagues argue that there is very limited police capacity in PICs to respond to transnational and organised crime which is characterised by complex and multi-layered networks. ‘These networks are mobile, well-resourced and strategically co-ordinated, enabling them to operate across porous borders.’ She notes that there is limited data to assess the extent of transnational crime but the specific areas of concern include environmental crimes related to illegal fishing and resources extraction, sex trafficking, trafficking illegal drugs and precursor chemicals.

Sinclair Dinnen and Grant Walton analyse the growing complexity of crime in the Pacific and consider the changing shape of security governance in PNG and the prominent move to private security. Current crime trends, lack of police capacity, and new pressures on policing like COVID-19 provide an opportunity to rethink the security landscape. They conclude that ‘the role of private providers in PNG’s networked security will be crucial for reframing more effective ... security provision’. Anouk Ride extends this critical reflection and concludes that police and legal reforms that open access to justice for communities, and create greater social accountability would go a long way to making the security landscape more fertile. Jone Kalouniwai and colleagues describe their efforts to take a fresh approach to national security and Fiji’s unique approach to integrating values and traditional concepts into contemporary security dialogues.

This Special Edition on Pacific Security is provocative reading. We hope it stimulates more thought on how we can secure the future of the Pacific and build resilience together.



## Security through a Pacific lens

Meg Keen, *The Australian National University*

### Introduction

The security challenges affecting the Pacific island region are steadily mounting, most recently the combination of COVID-19 and Tropical Cyclones Harold and Yasa have strained health systems, economies and services to near breaking point. In the words of the current Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), Dame Meg Taylor:

For the Pacific, COVID-19 amplified the persistent vulnerabilities that continue to challenge our resilient development and our security. Therefore, far from being the cause of current social, economic and political challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities, in some cases deepening and broadening them, and in other cases accelerating their arrival.<sup>1</sup>

The interplay of different security challenges has long been appreciated in the Pacific. Recently, it was highlighted by Pacific island leaders' 2018 *Boe Declaration on Regional Security*<sup>2</sup> which defined an 'expanded concept of security'. Climate security was recognised as the primary threat to regional security, but other security concerns were also noted – human security, environmental/resource security, traditional security (transnational crime, cyber security, and border protection). The complex interplay between these security challenges and limited resources raises the need for regional and national cooperation to build resilience.

Some persistent and pervasive security threats, such as climate change, require commitment at multiple scales. International action is a necessity for effective mitigation and adaptation, and national and local action are required for adaptation and sustainable development. Resources for both are inadequate. Even prior to the harsh economic hit of COVID-19, financial and mitigation commitments to address climate change impacts required 'scaling up' to adequately address small island state vulnerability (Watson and Schalteck 2020) and meet global financial commitments.<sup>3</sup> Resources are likely to decline or be diverted now with the mounting COVID-19 induced financial woes of donors and Pacific governments.

The urgency for action across a range of security issues remains a consistent theme in leaders' statements, but also consistent are differences over priorities in a very diverse region with competing interests both within the region and between regional players. Donors often focus on traditional security issues such as border security and political stability, partially to protect their interests and to deter foreign powers perceived to have competing priorities in the region (Hunt 2017; Fry 2019:167–189). Climate and human security issues get donor attention, but often in an uncoordinated manner that is not systemic and enduring. The Boe Declaration is an effort to get a better balance of attention between different forms of security. In particular, there is a push by the Pacific island governments for stronger global action on climate change consistent with their primary security concern, and their disillusionment with the commitments of the global community, including Australia.

Advancing security issues of high priority to the Pacific often require coalition diplomacy and advocacy on the international stage – and those coalitions need to reach beyond traditional partners, evident from the Pacific's demands for climate and environment protection action, and their leveraging of likeminded nations such as those in the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). But there are also considerable security challenges at home. Conflicts over resources and land, tension among ethnic groups and power elites and corruption have destabilised governments around the region. Human security issues related to health, education, livelihoods and equity also pull at the social fabric and can be destabilising.

With limited government reach and resources, but strong subsistence and traditional communities, cultural integrity and traditional ways remain key to the

Pacific security agenda. The ‘Pacific Way’ (Mara 1997) reflects a commitment to cultural values and relationships that can lay the foundation for social stability, a view reiterated in the published National Security Strategies of Samoa and Vanuatu. Fiji’s Prime Minister Bainimarama projected the importance of culture and traditional approaches onto the international stage when he introduced the Fijian concept of ‘Talanoa’ to the UN Climate Change Conference (COP23) (Talanoa Dialogue 2017). This initiative, and the ‘Blue Pacific’ reframing of Pacific security and development issues put a high value on narratives that convey security issues and approaches through a Pacific lens.

This article analyses some of the prominent issues and concerns that are shaping current security discourses and their practical implications. What is revealed is a stronger Pacific framing of security issues, but the security agenda is often not well coordinated between sectors and levels of government. Pressing domestic security issues related to human security (e.g., health and gender) struggle to get policy and practical traction. The predominantly state-centric approach to security can exclude key community groups from shaping the agenda and contributing to resilience. Stronger domestic action, more diverse partnerships, and new or reinvigorated platforms that support collaborative action can all help create a more stable and resilient future.

## Security through a Pacific lens

The Boe Declaration provides a succinct overview of security challenges affecting Pacific island forum countries, but rather than breaking new ground, it reasserts the security issues which have long been of concern in the region as reflected in previous Declarations (Box 1). The Pacific narrative and lens on security have been remarkably consistent across the full range of security issues since independence. A range of human security topics have been raised in past Declarations, but often left to nations to deal with the delicate issues of sovereignty, services, and equity. New issues such as cyber security are emerging but do not yet rival more enduring security concerns on the policy agenda. Quantitative analyses, such as presented in Box 1, while informative, still require a closer look at the trends and the socio-political dynamics that drive security agendas. In the subsections to follow, four key security issues are explored in more detail: regional collaboration, climate change, human security and geopolitics.

### *Regional collaboration: The ideal and the reality*

Approaches to Pacific security are still predominantly top-down – from international and regional declarations to national and local actions. They often become ‘lost in translation’ when regional priorities transition to the local level (PIFS 2013). Competing priorities and the advancement of vested and elite interests are national security stumbling blocks, particularly evident in fishery, forestry and mining sectors where granting licences can benefit a few at the cost of community and environmental security, as appears to be occurring in PNG’s MOU with China for a fishery industrial park in Western province (Smith 2020).

National action on regional security issues falters if there are perceived threats to sovereignty resulting in a reluctance to share national information and data to address trans-boundary security challenges, for example sharing data about oceanic resource exploitation across sectors. The need for regional cooperation is a recurring theme in the Pacific island security narratives since the establishment of the Pacific Islands Forum. The 1992 *Honiara Declaration on Law Enforcement Cooperation* called for a more ‘comprehensive, integrated and collaborative approach to counter transnational crime threats’. Later in 2016 the *UN Transnational Organised Crime in the Pacific* report again noted that cooperation among PICs would help to develop more robust collaborative and independent efforts to fight transnational crime and cross-border threats (UNODC 2016:77–81). Recent research has highlighted that when law enforcement agencies collaborate across jurisdictions progress is possible, such as the recent successful drug seizures in Tonga and the French Pacific, and the progress of the Asia–Pacific Group on Money Laundering; and when security responses are ‘networked’ across formal and community sectors systems, such as police, private security and village leaders, resilience is enhanced (Walton and Dinnen 2020).

While coordinated regional action on security issues raises delicate sovereignty issues, it is not an insurmountable challenge. The 2000 *Biketawa Declaration* enabled the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), a collaborative effort across Forum island countries, led by Australia. There is no doubt the collective action had a significant impact on the security of Solomon Islands and the policing capacity of the region (Putt et al. 2018), but the power balance between Pacific island and Western influences on security framing and interventions was raised (yet again) by a Pacific Island Forum review:

Though RAMSI is often seen as a stellar example of regional cooperation, the mission might have been better served by drawing more constructively on that regional element, not simply in terms of personnel, but also as regards command structure (Fraenkel et al. 2014).

Resource constraints at the national level often make support from regional and donor agencies a necessary, though not sufficient, measure. The PIF Forum Officials Sub-Committee on Regional Security provides a platform for dialogue among Forum security agencies and stakeholders to work together. It is also a means to encourage joint training and capacity building across security agencies dealing with law and order, customs and immigration. While this has value, well-coordinated action, information sharing and strategic analysis across countries remains weak with some notable exceptions such as the Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre, and the Pacific Islands Forum’s Fisheries Agencies’ Regional Fisheries Surveillance Centre.

The *Boe Declaration on Regional Security* and its Action Plan attempts to bridge the regional–national security space, recognise the growing geopolitical stresses, and reiterate the need for collaboration driven by Pacific states. The commitment by all nations to implement national security strategies has the potential to achieve multiple objectives that often undermine regional initiatives: nations

translate regional security priorities into national security strategies tailored to place and values (to date through intense community consultation). Leadership and commitment is advanced through a multi-agency national security secretariat; and, national security strategies can better shape donor engagement and link to budget and policy priorities.

To date only two national security strategies have been produced and published in response to the Boe Declaration – Samoa (2018) and Vanuatu (2019) – both give high priority to issues related to climate security, human security, cyber security/safety, and border security (Figure 1). More strategies are forthcoming in 2021. They have the potential to provide a more assertive shaping of the security agenda by PICs.

### *Climate security: Falling short globally and at home*

Pacific leaders frequently express frustration about the lack of responsiveness to their calls for action on climate change, an existential threat to many Pacific communities. The urgency for action is increasing as recent research suggests that climate change may be occurring more rapidly than previously assumed (Cheng et al. 2019). At the most recent UN annual climate change conference, COP25, the former Tuvaluan Prime Minister lamented ongoing ‘climate denialism’, and still more explicitly, the 2019 Pacific Island Forum *Kainaki II Declaration* didn’t mince words with its clear title “Declaration for Urgent Climate Action Now”, calling for international action on emissions reductions, climate finance, and mechanisms for loss and damage compensation.

The PICs have played a strong and assertive role in international climate forums. They have leveraged international groups to project their voices beyond what their relatively small political/economic heft would predict. The UN Pacific Small Island Developing States (PSIDS) group has leveraged resources and carefully coordinated negotiation strategies to magnify influence. Strategic alliances have also helped to project their concerns and preferred solutions onto the global stage, including AOSIS, the G77 plus China, and the UN Asia Pacific Group.

These non-traditional (or perhaps more correctly, post-colonial) alliances are deemed to be necessary when security interests diverge from more traditional partners. While PICs have increased their influence on climate negotiations, frustrations remain at global outcomes and the increasing climate impacts on national security and development prospects. The ADB (2013) estimates that by 2100 in a business-as-usual scenario, climate change will cost the Pacific 12.7 per cent of GDP each year, dwarfing any economic growth – the human toll is incalculable. Predicted sea level rises threaten the very existence of atolls.

But challenges are not all on the global stage. Domestic action to improve climate security has been mixed in its efficacy. Sea walls have shifted impacts, not always eliminated them (Piggott-McKellar et al. 2020); rapid urbanisation without strong planning is creating more climate vulnerability (Connell and Keen, 2020); and water, sanitation and food security are being adversely affected by

the interplay of population pressures, resource limitations and climate change (PIFS 2018a). As climatic events get more severe, they will continue to magnify existing security and development deficits. Much more political, human and financial investment will be required to build local resilience.

With few resources, PICs are tapping into global climate funds and donor supported programs to enhance local action, but resources continue to fall short of needs. At the national level, disaster risk reduction policies and funds are reducing damage costs and providing a means to build resilience (PIFS 2018a), but future prospects still look grim. The interaction of climate, human and resource strains are likely to result in destabilising trends, including a decline in coastal fisheries productivity, rising costs of extreme climate events, and exacerbation of health challenges (PIFS 2018b). Making better progress locally will require a transformation of resource management practices and far better engagement with community groups able to enhance social connectivity, sustainability and action.

### *Human security: security for whom?*

Human security issues are pressing in the Pacific, and predominantly left for national action, particularly in the areas of health, gender inequality, urbanisation, and informality/social exclusion, to name only a few. On the health front, activities to address COVID-19 and other infectious diseases are increasing, but health issues related to non-communicable diseases (NCDs) remain poorly addressed although they too are at epidemic levels. NCDs – heart disease, cancers, respiratory diseases and diabetes – cause up to 80 per cent of deaths in the region (The Lancet 2019), and the trends are moving in the wrong direction, or improving too slowly.

Gender security also poses significant and persistent challenges despite occasional regional and national commitments, for example, the 2012 *PIF Gender Equality Declaration*, and national support for the international *Conventions on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW). Gender-based violence and inequality remain at globally high (and unacceptable) levels. Greater security will require systemic change affecting values, leadership and economic opportunities for women. There are some inspiring activities such as the UN Women’s work with market vendors and action against gender-based violence, but we have not yet tipped the scales to transformational change.

All these human security issues are related to another concerning trend that has the potential to be destabilising – growing inequality in the region. Limited economic opportunities constrain the ability of households to respond to external shocks and invest in health, education and shelter (Dornan 2020). Social protection measures in the Pacific are few, with most reliant on customary networks and social capital, yet recent research has questioned how strong and enduring these more traditional safety nets are in the rapidly urbanising Pacific (Mecartney and Connell 2017). Following COVID-19, more social protection programs are emerging (ESCAP 2020), but fine tuning is

still needed given that access can be limited for those without formal employment or land titles, or who are among the growing youth bulge.

### *Geopolitics: messy, but not a sea-change*

In 2017, the PIF leaders added a new perspective to the security narrative with their commitment to the 'Blue Pacific' to advance future prosperity and wellbeing through a stronger collective vision and action agenda. The PIF Secretary General, Dame Meg Taylor (2019) applied the concept to the geopolitical competition between Western countries and China. She observed that prosperity and security was about balancing external engagements, the right to be 'friends to all' and to nurture genuine relationships with those countries that offer development and economic opportunities. China's *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) is particularly appealing with its promise of large infrastructure investment, but it will not be free from external influence, elite capture or corruption.

Western jitters about the loss of influence and the growing reach of China in the region, has resulted in accusations of 'strategic denial' (Herr 1986; Fry 2019). Critical assessments of Chinese engagement in the region have urged more evidence-based analysis – with Fox and Dornan (2018) arguing that fears of the China debt trap may be overblown, though the trends are concerning. Those chasing economic development through loans and debt could contribute to national instability if elite interests, accountability frameworks, and resource exploitation activities are not well managed, as Pala (2020) argues in the case of Chinese investment in Kiribati. The switch to recognise China over Taiwan in September 2019 by Solomon Islands also posed political and security divisions reminiscent of the ethnic tensions that preceded the Tensions (Cavanough 2020).

The Blue Pacific concept brings the security of the vast ocean spaces of the Pacific islands to the fore, along with resource contestation. The Blue Pacific covers more than 98 per cent of the region. Many tuna rich countries of the Pacific islands will find their revenues dropping sharply as climate change forces fish to migrate to cooler waters, and unregulated and unreported fishing persists – currently draining over US\$100 million per annum from Pacific island countries (MRAG 2016). Many PICs look to their traditional allies to help manage resource contestation and degradation through regional and bilateral assistance, such as the Pacific Maritime Assistance program (patrol boats and aerial surveillance to protect ocean spaces).

Partnerships can help enhance security and balance geopolitical pressures. The Pacific island countries have proven adept on the international stage, particularly on climate and ocean security. Partnerships with traditional partners have remained strong and productive, but on occasions also strained. Australia remains the primary development partner and an enduring friend with historical and cultural ties. But differing priorities and perceptions can

boil over, as evident from the Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele's (2018) reflections on Western analyses of Pacific island relations with China:

...some might say there is a patronising nuance, believing Pacific nations did not know what they were doing, or were incapable of reaping benefits of close relationships with countries that will be in their region for some time to come.

Stronger security outcomes could emerge if there was better cooperation between those with common interests. There are a few good examples which have yielded positive security outcomes, including multi-nation ocean surveillance exercises, the recent COVID-19 response under the Pacific Humanitarian Corridor, and the successful collaboration of fisheries rich nations under the Parties to the Nauru Agreement. But much more needs to be done to maximise security dividends from regional efforts through stronger regional architecture that is well linked to national institutions.

### **Security reflections**

The concept of security in the Pacific has always been broad and even prescient about the complex interplay between different drivers of instability. There has been a consistent desire by PICs to enhance security across environmental, human and traditional areas, and to tap into genuine and enduring partnerships that can support national efforts. While regional initiatives are important, the main action on security will occur at the national level and the success of regional initiatives will depend on buy-in from national leaders and strong national integration.

What appears to be persistently weak at all levels are the collaborative platforms that are trusted and can support security cooperation between national and local levels in ways that are inclusive of non-government and community groups, and can coordinate action between regional and national levels. There is some promising movement with greater inclusion of community and non-government groups in priority setting by the Pacific Island Forum, and in responses to major climatic events through the multi-stakeholder national disaster response systems that span global to local.

It is not possible to devise the 'perfect' security system which can act on every security threat, but the broader definition of security under the Boe Declaration and the emerging national security strategies are a positive step forward. Creating documents will not be enough, there also needs to be the institutional architecture and policy support to translate the words to action, and boost accountability. There have been some exemplary first steps in relations to Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response, Pacific Transnational Crime Units, and Pacific Fisheries Surveillance Centres – we just need to get better at sharing the positive lessons, working together, and leveraging efforts for transformational change.



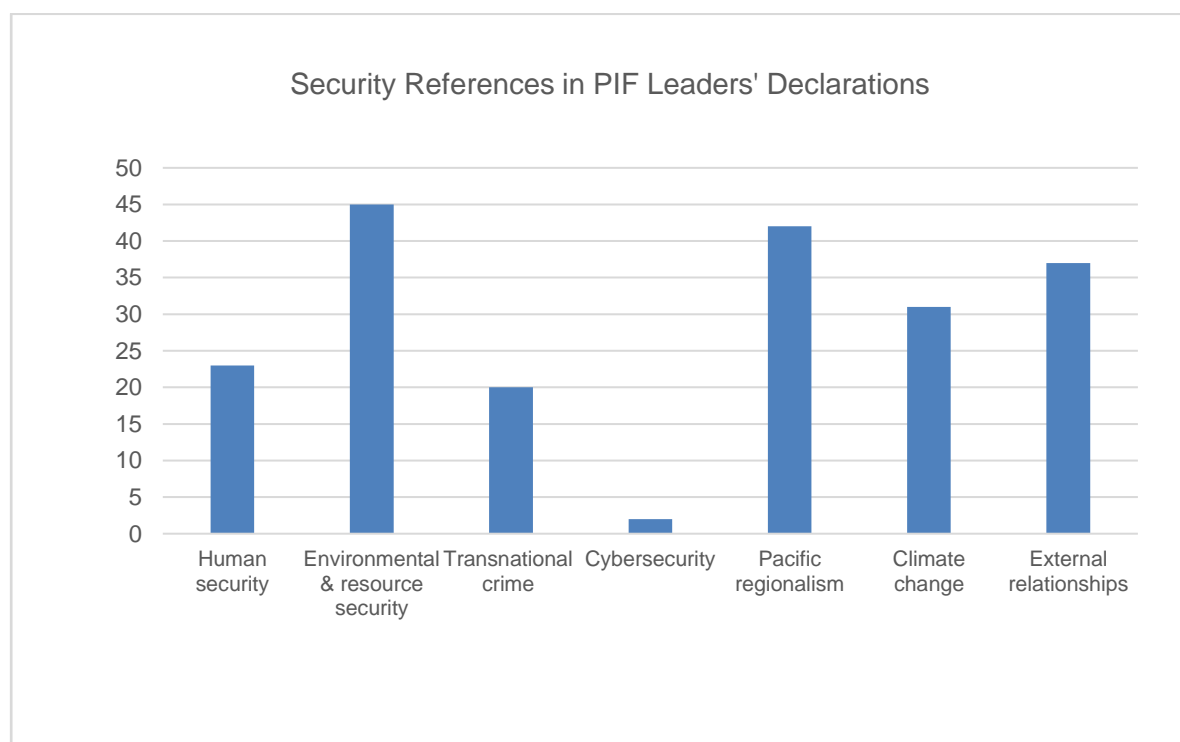
### Box 1: Pacific Voices – Security Issues in PIF Leaders’ Declarations

Over the last 50 years, the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders’ Declarations have dealt with a wide range of security themes (see chart below). The most recent Declaration dealing directly with regional security, the Boe Declaration, explicitly recognises the ‘expanded concept of security’, but this is not new. The Pacific security lens has always been ‘expanded’ and reached far beyond issues of national border protection, law and order, and geopolitics.

Climate change has been recognised as a major security challenge for over three decades. Since it was first mentioned in the 1988 PIF Leaders’ Declaration, climate change has been high on the security agenda, when it was noted that ‘The Forum expressed concern about climatic changes in the South Pacific and their potential for serious social and economic disruption in countries of the region’.

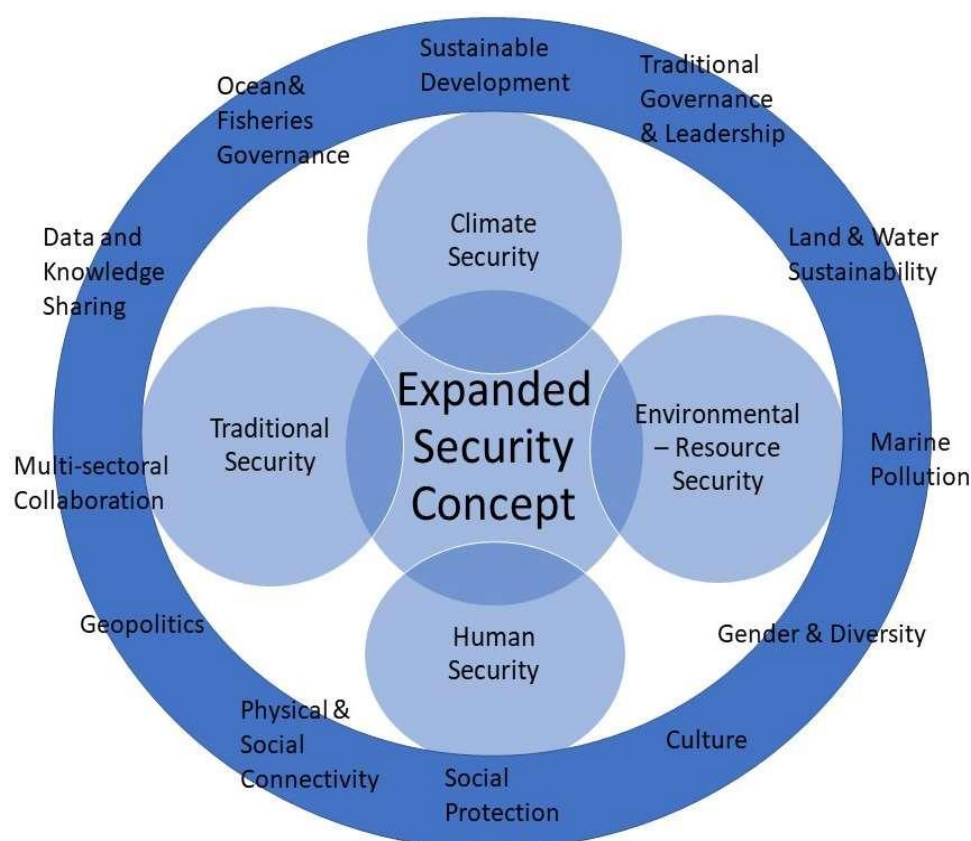
Unsurprisingly, resource and environment security have consistently been raised in Leaders’ Declarations given the strong cultural associations with land and water, and thriving subsistent economies. Similarly, the desirability of collective action has also been regularly recognised, if not always translated into action. Even geopolitics and donor engagement/external relationships have figured large – but in recent times the challenges of balancing external and internal agendas have been far more assertively advanced.

New security issues are creeping into the Declarations in recognition of a globally connected and digitised world that is reaching its tentacles into the Pacific, creating development opportunities but also new security challenges (e.g. cybersecurity and transnational crime).



Note: Only themes that had significant text were recorded in this rapid assessment, not those security issues merely in a list, or just mentioned in passing.

Figure 1: The Pacific Island ‘Expanded Security Concept’ and issues highlighted in National Security Strategies



Note: The graphic is an adaptation of the Expanded Security Concept from the Pacific Islands Forum Boe Declaration on Regional Security. The outer circle provides examples of issues given prominent attention in the published National Security Strategies of Samoa and Vanuatu which were written in response to the Boe Declaration.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Meg Taylor 2020, Introductory Remarks by the Secretary General of the Pacific Islands Forum at the 2020 Forum Economic Ministers Meeting (FEMM). 11 August 2020. Available at: <https://www.forumsec.org/2020/08/11/introductory-remarks-by-the-secretary-general-of-the-pacific-islands-forum-dame-meg-taylor-at-the-2020-forum-economic-ministers-meeting/>
- <sup>2</sup> Available at: <https://www.forumsec.org/2018/09/05/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>
- <sup>3</sup> See WRI, Global Climate Fund tracker at: <https://www.wri.org/resources/data-visualizations/green-climate-fund-contributions-calculator-20>

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# Pacific Island security: What role can national security strategies play?

*Tim George<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

Over the last 20 years the majority of countries globally have developed their own national security strategies or policies. But this has not been the case in the Pacific Island Countries (PICs) with the exception of Papua New Guinea, which completed a National Security Policy in 2013 and Fiji, which undertook substantial work on a policy over several years. Now, with gathering momentum, national security strategies are part of the Pacific regional agenda. In 2018, Samoa and then Vanuatu, commenced work on their strategies completing them in 2018 and 2019, others are forthcoming in countries such as Solomon Islands, Tonga and Cook Islands. The concept of such strategies received a major boost from regional leaders in 2018, who, in the Boe Declaration on Regional Security, committed to ‘strengthening our respective national security approaches by developing our national security strategies’ (PIFS 2018).

This position was reinforced the following year in the Boe Declaration Action Plan, agreed to by leaders at the 2019 Tuvalu Forum, which foreshadowed ‘supporting Forum members, as may be required, in the development of national security strategies/policies’ (PIFS 2019:21). A number of development partners have provided support for the development and implementation of national security strategies, and a new source of such support is the Australia Pacific Security College. Several Pacific Island countries are now well advanced in the development of national security strategies, with more countries proposing to do so.

Typically, a national security strategy provides an overarching framework that outlines the nation’s strategic context, identifies security challenges and opportunities, articulates the nation’s vision and agenda, sets priorities for coming years, and sets in motion reforms to strengthen the national security community. Can such strategies better equip governments to handle national security issues? The answer is a strong yes – providing the strategy is realistic, the product of widespread consultation, and effectively implemented.

## The expanded concept of security is now widely accepted

Historically, national security has tended to be viewed principally in terms of sovereignty, territorial integrity and defense of the homeland including maintenance of internal stability through prevention of major civil unrest, terrorist acts or other significant breakdowns in law and order. An expanded concept of security has, however, received widespread acceptance in recent years. Firstly, there is the realisation of the gravity of the global threats posed by ‘problems without borders’ – such as climate change, the spread of infectious diseases, and cyber attacks. Secondly,

there is recognition that human security and a just society are fundamental to national security.

Pacific Island leaders have been forthright in articulating the main security priorities for the region. In the Boe Declaration, they affirmed an ‘expanded concept of security which addresses the wide range of security issues in the region, both traditional and non-traditional, with an increasing emphasis on:

- human security, including humanitarian assistance, to protect the rights, health and prosperity of Pacific people;
- environmental and resource security;
- security from transnational crime; and
- cybersecurity, to maximise protections and opportunities for Pacific infrastructure and peoples in the digital age’ (PIFS 2018).

The priority given to human security in the Boe Declaration was prescient – the COVID-19 crisis represents the gravest security challenge to the region in the post-independence era.

## What does a national security strategy look like?

Globally, national security strategies vary considerably in scope, length, focus, and level of ambition. Pacific Island nations too each have their own distinct characteristics, and there is no single framework that could be applied across the region. Nevertheless, the countries of the Pacific region face many of the same challenges, such as:

- climate change and natural disasters;
- the vastness of the region and its huge exclusive economic zones (EEZs), sparsely populated by mostly small island states remote from each other;
- small formal economies a great distance from major markets, with high costs and heavy reliance on development assistance;
- resource constraints and depletion of natural resources;
- illegal fishing and weak borders; and
- increasingly sophisticated transnational crime.

In addition, the Pacific region faces, to varying degrees, major human security challenges such as rising inequality, expanding and restive youth populations, and gender based violence. Health security is a particular challenge – not just because of the threat of the COVID-19 virus and other infectious diseases – but also an alarming non-communicable disease crisis in much of the region. So it makes sense for countries of the region to work together, and share their experiences and goals as they develop their

national security strategies. The starting point is the Boe Declaration Action Plan 2019, which states that:

A national security strategy or policy is an adaptable framework for a country to meet the basic needs and security concerns of citizens (human security) and address external and internal threats to the country. National security frameworks will enable Members to coherently and holistically identify their national security priorities and what they require (capacity and capability) to address them. In addition to this, reflecting key issues such as human security, oversight and accountability, human rights and gender ensures relevance, legitimacy, ownership, and sustainability thus improving the efficiency of how security is provided (PIFS 2019:21).

A national security strategy will typically include the following:

- a vision and objectives for national security;
- an outline of the security environment – national, regional and global – prioritising threats and opportunities;
- an outline of the capabilities needed to meet challenges and maximise opportunities;
- an action plan for specific initiatives, and a more general statement of directions the government proposes to take to reinforce national security over the short and long term; and
- a description of the government machinery and other measures proposed by the government to implement the strategy.

Strategies should take full account of the nation's governance and development context, be fully aligned with national, regional and international goals and commitments, and not duplicate or seek to replace existing plans, strategies and machinery in the different areas of government.

Finally, strategies should be clear, concise and readable documents – well understood and disseminated both within government and the wider community.

## **Developing a strategy – consultation is the key**

An effective process for the development of a national security strategy firstly requires strong whole-of-government leadership and direction, and secondly, a comprehensive program of consultation. Wide consultation is essential to gain a full understanding of the most pressing security issues across the nation, and to strengthen national ownership of the strategy. Consultations – and the lively debates often produced – are also a valuable awareness raising mechanism, whether on discussions of cyber security, gender-based violence, illegal fishing, or other national security issues.

Samoa and Vanuatu provide two examples. In the development of Samoa's National Security Policy and the accompanying Implementation Strategy, the Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Prime Minister and Cabinet oversaw all stages of the project, keeping the Prime

Minister regularly updated, and led the community consultations on the two main islands, Upolu and Savai'i. In addition, more than 60 consultations were held with stakeholders in ministries and other government bodies – and with representatives of village councils and other community leaders, the churches, civil society and the private sector.

In the case of Vanuatu, the Prime Minister and several ministers kept abreast of the development of the National Security Strategy throughout the process. The consultation process was led by the Director General of the Ministry of Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Director General of the Interior Ministry and the Acting Police Commissioner/Commander of the Vanuatu Mobile Force. In addition to individual consultations, a number of major seminars were held, involving civil servants, police, the *Malvatumauri* (advisory body of chiefs), and representatives of churches, other community organisations, civil society and the private sector. Consultations were held on the islands of Santo and Tanna, as well as in Port Vila.

Best practice demands that national security strategies be treated as live documents which remain under regular review. It is important that strategies be updated as circumstances and perceived risks change, and that the nation's security institutions retain the flexibility and resources needed to respond quickly to new challenges as they arise.

## **Values and institutions**

Security strategies typically set out a vision for a safe, stable, sustainable and prosperous nation, based on the foundation of the nation's constitution, culture, traditional knowledge, and – in the case of many Pacific Island countries – Christian principles. Security strategies also address the attributes and capabilities nations need to safeguard national security, ranging, for example, from strong and effective institutions; to political stability and good governance; justice and human rights for all; a strong, well-managed and resilient economy; and an effective promotion of the nation's external interests.

An additional need in some countries is stronger due diligence to weed out foreigners involved in transnational crime or those seeking to exploit offshore financial centres, citizenship schemes, and other areas. A fundamental requirement for security forces, whether they are police, armed forces, border protection, or other front line officials, is that they be professional, well trained and equipped, and accountable.

In the case of PICs, there is a particular institutional need for resilient national systems for disaster preparedness, response and recovery, and climate change adaptation. Countries of the region are well served in this regard and natural disaster relief mechanisms, involving declarations of states of emergency are generally well practiced, effective, and enjoy widespread public support. Such mechanisms are now being utilised in managing the COVID-19 threat, where the region overall has had conspicuous success to date in keeping the pandemic at bay.

## **Tradition and culture play a key role in underpinning social cohesion**

Communities and traditional institutions in the PICs – to an extent not widely appreciated outside the region – play a strong role in maintaining social cohesion, security and harmony. Their representatives normally would have a prominent role in the consultation process as a security strategy is developed. A priority is to find the right balance between traditional values and the requirements of the formal justice system, as well as between economic development and land use. This will be increasingly challenging in our globalised and modern world.

## **Regional collaboration is fundamental**

Many national security challenges are obviously global issues. For example, climate change, pandemics, transnational crime, cyber security, all of which demand international and regional collaboration. At the same time Pacific Island countries share many similar security challenges and values. They have a strong network of development partners and regional organisations to work with – notably the Pacific Island Forum. The case for very close regional collaboration on security issues is compelling and should be highlighted in security strategies, particularly as most island countries are small with limited resources.

In an increasingly contested and complex region, it is more important than ever for member nations to be able to promote and defend their interests abroad. Small island countries need strong foreign ministries and networks of missions abroad, although the cost of such networks is often prohibitive. Pacific Island countries have successfully pooled resources at their diplomatic mission to the United Nations in New York, and it would be opportune to examine such pooling models in other capitals of regional importance.

## **Implementation of a strategy will determine its success**

The most important outcome of a national security strategy developed by a Pacific Island nation will, in many cases, be the implementation measures – notably those dealing with new or strengthened government machinery. Most nations of the region currently have only a very modest national security system, or not one at all, and only few personnel specifically assigned to cover national security issues.

The key element of government machinery likely to emerge from a security strategy is a senior level national security committee or council, with the authority to take decisions and make recommendations to Cabinet. The essential requirement is that all relevant agencies be represented on such a body. A widespread problem in the region is poor collaboration and information sharing between government agencies on national security issues, and more generally the absence of a deeply rooted ‘whole-of-government’ culture.

Samoa and Vanuatu have opted for slightly different models in their national security machinery, although both

nations have preserved the essential requirement of a whole-of-government body.

In early 2019, Samoa established a National Security Committee, comprising representatives of relevant government agencies, at the level of chief executive officer or equivalent. The Committee meets regularly and has been playing a valuable role in coordinating advice and action on a range of security issues. In Vanuatu, a Bill for the establishment of a National Security Council, comprising specified ministers and agency heads, was passed in Parliament in December 2019. Work is now well advanced for the establishment of a National Security Council Secretariat and appointment of a National Security Adviser.

## **National assessment capacities need boosting**

An important element of a national security strategy concerns a nation’s assessment capability. The Pacific region is weak in this regard, with a number of countries lacking capacity for their own independent assessment – essential for sound decision making on national and regional security issues. More generally, the lack of good quality data is a widespread problem in the Pacific region, whether related to crime, socioeconomic issues and livelihoods, the economy, health, or climate change. Now is the time to boost national assessment capabilities, drawing on the growing amount of information and analysis available from open sources, as well as from regional organisations and trusted bilateral partners.

One encouraging development is the establishment in 2019 of the Pacific Fusion Centre. Australia is working in the Centre with regional security agencies and governments to strengthen information sharing and maritime domain awareness in relation to some of the threats outlined in the Boe Declaration, such as illegal fishing, drugs trafficking, and other transnational crimes. The Centre is also proving valuable in strengthening analytic practice and policy decision making processes within Pacific Island governments.

## **Working together is the way forward**

Pacific Island nations have only limited scope to influence global trends. However, the region has shown that on some fundamental questions of human security, such as climate change, and the future of small islands states, it can have a strong voice globally. Pacific Island nations have also shown the world an innovative example of collective action, with the decision by Forum Foreign Ministers in April 2020 to establish the ‘Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19’ under the Biketawa Declaration (PIFS 2020).

In 2018, Forum leaders took the far-sighted step of embracing the concept of national security strategies. The COVID-19 crisis has generally reinforced the importance of sound decision making as nations face the plethora of security challenges ahead. National security strategies, if effectively implemented, will be a major boost to governments in dealing with the tough and finely balanced decisions that are becoming all too common in this complex world.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Tim George assisted the Government of Samoa develop its National Security Policy and Implementation Strategy in 2018, and the Government of Vanuatu develop its National Security Strategy in 2018/2019. A former Australian diplomat, he was Special Coordinator to the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) from 2006 to 2009. These are his personal views.

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# Rethinking human security: COVID-19 and the social solidarity economy in the Pacific

*Steven Ratuva, University of Canterbury, New Zealand*

## Introduction

During their Nauru meeting in 2018 the Pacific Island leaders declared that climate change remains the ‘single greatest threat to the livelihood, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific’ (PIFS 2018:1). However, COVID-19 has overtaken events and changed the global and indeed regional security narratives in unprecedented ways. The sudden impact of COVID-19 has forced people into rethinking security and reframing development in our region. The pandemic has starkly revealed the fragility and lack of resilience of the much touted neoliberal economic system – which had to be bailed out through direct state subsidies and other forms of economic nationalisation (OECD 2020). Many in the Pacific – who relied on the frail market system for most of their lives – had to resort to the social solidarity economy (SSE) when they lost their jobs, state social protection resources ran dry and reliance on the formal economy looked bleak – SSE was key to survival in the midst of the seemingly endless effects of the pandemic. The pandemic has become the dominant security threat in the region and the world even displacing climate change and geopolitics from daily headlines.

COVID-19 is unique as a human security threat because the virus has a domino effect on other human security conditions such as unemployment, poverty, psychological depression, collective trauma, sociopolitical unrest and instability, social risks and wellbeing hazard (UNDP 2020a). Social protection resources and mechanisms by the state are limited, especially for poor states and communities, which means that innovative alternatives have to be sought (ILO 2020). For many Pacific Islanders, this means falling back on the SSE – which has been part of their lives for centuries – despite dramatic social transformation resulting from globalisation and deepening incorporation into the market economy.

This paper examines the critical role of the SSE in Pacific Island communities in providing a vital human security response to the social and economic impacts of COVID-19. Human security is a term – first used and officially introduced in the 1994 United Nations (UN) Human Development Report – which refers to sustaining and protecting people’s economic, political, health, personal, food, environmental and community wellbeing and dignity (Jolly and Ray 2006).

A central aspect of the Pacific SSE is communal capital, which refers to cultural mechanisms, norms and practices used to maintain collective social life, respond to crises and reproduce societal values, collective identities and communal institutions (Ratuva 2014). Since the advent of the capitalist system and colonial rule, Pacific Island economies consisted of a mixture of the introduced market system and SSE. Today, Pacific communities live at the

intersection of these two systems – one of which is based on market exchange of individualised commodities – while the other is based on people-to-people social relations. Communities act as agencies for social life by selectively choosing aspects from both systems which they find convenient to suit particular circumstances – the result often a more nuanced system consisting of various degrees of both (Ratuva 2004). Thus, it would be nonsensical to talk of purely subsistence or purely capitalist economies because of the complex admixtures relating the two modes of production (Ratuva 2014).

When there is a crisis in the market economy people readily fall back on the SSE for sustenance and survival – exactly what is happening as a result of COVID-19 where a threat to human security has forced communities to seek alternatives as the crisis of the market economy deepens. This paper is divided into three main sections. Firstly, I examine the concepts of SSE and communal capital and their relationship to human security. Secondly, I provide an overview of the impact of COVID-19 on Pacific Island communities. Thirdly, I provide an example of how these communities have utilised aspects of the SSE and communal capital as alternative survival strategies when the reach of the state and the effectiveness of the market system are limited.

## Social solidarity economy and communal capital: Conceptual narratives

The notion of SSE has a long historical genesis but in the 1990s, the significance of SSE in mainstream discourse was being recognised – especially when debates about alternative means of development raged amongst scholars and policy makers (Rafaelli 2017). A global conference organised by ILO on the subject agreed to define SSE as a ‘concept designating enterprises and organisations, in particular cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations, foundations and social enterprises, which have the specific feature of producing goods, services and knowledge while pursuing both economic and social aims and fostering solidarity’ (ILO 2009:1). This was in response to the need for alternate or complementary development paradigms to ‘re-balancing economic, social and environmental objectives’ (ibid).

One of the basic foundations of the SSE is the recognition of the significance of ethical values which prioritise the wellbeing of people and planet over profit and blind growth in economic development. The mushrooming of SSE based strategies, policies and programs in the last three decades has been attributed to:

- deteriorating living conditions and deepening poverty of people around the world;



- reaction against the commodification and trivialisation of humans as dispensable entities to be bought and sold in the market as part of neoliberal logic; and
- unscrupulous environmental degradation and extractive commercial behaviour causing global environmental pollution and climate change (Rafaelli 2017).

Thus, the growth of SSEs has been more or less spontaneous and grassroots led as communities rediscover traditional practices and cultural traits that they adapt to new technologies in the rapidly changing global climate (Peterson and Taylor 2003). SSE encompasses a wide range of programs that span multiple dimensions – including economic, social, environmental, political, communal and psychological spaces. The SSE is framed in different ways but some common principles on which it is built are equity, diversity, inclusion, democratised distribution of power and collective participation. The reaction against the predatory excesses of neoliberalism and the increasing inequality and marginalisation of the poor have raised issues about the ethics and morality of maximisation of profit at the cost of economic subjugation of others (Carrier 2018).

SSE draws meaning and identity from local histories, culture and local socioeconomic realities while simultaneously being transformative. The idea of SSE has been around for centuries, and became a rallying point in response to the predatory, extractive and exploitative nature of capitalism (Laville 2010). SSE is now being promoted by international organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and International Labour Organization (ILO), civil society organisations, scholars and grassroots communities. During the Rio+20 Summit, there was growing demand for the UN system to be more active in promoting and mainstreaming SSE into its programs – which led to the formation of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on the Social and Solidarity Economy (UNTFSSSE) in 2013. The UNTFSSSE consists of 18 UN agencies and the OECD as members, 13 civil society organisations as observers and ILO the Chair and Secretariat. The UNTFSSSE approaches SSE as a system of:

production and exchange of goods and services by a broad range of organizations and enterprises that pursue explicit social and/or environmental objectives...guided by the principles and practices of cooperation, solidarity, ethics and democratic self-management, among others, and can take the form of cooperatives, social enterprises, self-help groups or community associations, among others (UNTFSSSE 2017:1).

At the UN level, the SSE is seen as a mechanism to facilitate the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Debate on the nature and role of SSE has, however, continued to yield new discourses. For example, dominant discourses on SSE ‘remain poorly positioned for understanding the diverse models across the global South’ (Martinez et al. 2019:1). These alternative forms of production, exchange and consumption have found traction because of the failure of the market economy to protect the wellbeing of the poor and vulnerable in society globally – especially in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis.

Some UN member states have put in place legislation, policies and programs to frame and support SSE programs – and some states even formed an International Leading Group on Social and Solidarity Economy (ILGSSE).

## **Pandemic and human security in Pacific communities**

Although the COVID-19 infection rate in Pacific Island Countries (PICs) was uneven – with some having relatively high infection rates and some without any infection at all – the impact on human security in such areas as poverty, unemployment, lack of income, and state and other services has been deep and overwhelming. No PIC has been spared. WHO figures of 15 October, 2020 show the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the PICs had reached 16,909 (WHO 2020a). The most affected countries are French Polynesia with 10,971 confirmed cases and 52 deaths; Guam with 5755 cases and 91 deaths and Northern Mariana with 100 infections and two deaths (WHO, 2020b).

When the pandemic started, a total of 13 countries in the Pacific declared a state of emergency – American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Guam, Nauru, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), Palau, PNG, Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu (UNESCO 2020). Around six countries had a combination of partial and full lockdowns and curfews – Guam, Fiji, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Tonga and Vanuatu. Schools were closed in almost all the countries with some later re-opened (UNESCO 2020). As in other countries around the world, the lockdown in the Pacific was accompanied by challenges in information dissemination, misinformation on COVID-19, anxiety, psychosocial stress, and stigma. Those who were infected, as in the case of Fiji, became targets of online abuse and threats. Another associated challenge is physical distancing, especially as it is common for many to sleep and live in the same room in small houses (Lindsay 2020). A number of initiatives have been established, such as the Vanuatu WASH project, to teach students at school to hand wash and cough into their elbows. One of the challenges is that some schools do not have hand washing and toilet facilities.

Loss of jobs as a result of the collapse of the tourism industry has severely impacted Pacific economies and undermined young people’s employment prospects with the labour market’s ability to recover a huge challenge (ILO and ADB 2020). Some countries have been able to respond to this through wage subsidies but by and large these were not sufficient to mitigate the ever deepening economic crisis. People had to resort to the SSE. Many PICs had to seek emergency assistance from traditional aid donors to address their budgetary shortfalls adding to their already mounting debt levels (World Bank 2020a). Amongst other forms of assistance by various donors, for example, the World Bank provided US\$20 million for PNG and US\$7.4 million for Fiji for COVID-19 response programs (World Bank 2020b). The Solomon Islands government issued a SI\$120 million bond to absorb excess liquidity in the

market and minimise the impact of COVID-19. In addition, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and China offered financial assistance as part of budgetary aid. Due to close contact with their diaspora population which make up the highest infection rate in the US, the Marshall Islands have been quite cautious but optimistic about their resilience based approach, developed from their climate change adaptation strategies. The World Bank provided a US\$2.5 million assistance package to help strengthen the Marshall Islands resilience program.

Apart from declaring emergencies, closing airports and ports and keeping strict watch on gatherings, there was also a challenge associated with general policing to ensure compliance with the regulations and political security, given the history of political instability in some PICs (The Guardian 2020). Vanuatu, like Fiji, had to confront the double jeopardy of COVID-19 and the destruction by tropical Cyclone Harold. Vanuatu's exposure to the cyclone path has made it more resilient to disasters as well as receiving constant humanitarian aid. Vanuatu's neighbour, New Caledonia, began easing social movement after a few days without any new cases of COVID-19. Samoa has followed a similar approach as it has been COVID-free from the outset, while taking strict measures to close the border to avoid a similar situation to the measles epidemic imported from New Zealand in 2019. French Polynesia, where infection has taken place, has relied largely on the French government to provide financial resources for its responses to COVID-19.

The relative isolation of most PICs also acts as a sort of safety net against large scale infection despite the fact that in human security terms, the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) are a very high risk category because of their susceptibility to non-communicable diseases. Ten countries in the Pacific have the highest obesity rates in the world – and there is a prevalence of the triple affliction of malnutrition – a condition where undernutrition, micro-nutrient deficiencies and obesity coexist (FAO 2020). The leading cause of death in these countries is non-communicable diseases, a result of a dramatic change in diet from fresh traditional food from the sea and land to high carb, fat, sugar and salt processed food. In some Pacific communities, imported food constitutes more than half of the population's food intake. The Pacific Humanitarian Pathway has allowed the flow of imported food supplies to the islands as people focus more on family gardening.

Disruptions in food chain supplies due to port and airport closures resulting in high prices of imported goods, together with the surge in unemployment, drastic reduction in cash income and demise in corporate and state services, has compelled people to seek solace in alternative and more sustainable forms of production, sustenance and wellbeing. Many have fallen back on the SSE as a way of sustaining their wellbeing when the market economy which they had put so much faith in was no longer delivering goods, employment, food and other basic necessities of life, which they have been dependent on for a long time. I will now examine this in detail.

## **Human security, social solidarity economy and communal capital: The example of the barter system**

Since the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown was felt, most Pacific Island communities resorted to alternative means of sustenance – the most familiar and one they naturally associated with was the SSE (UNDP 2020b). This is not to suggest that the SSE is new, but rather its significance has been heightened by the shortcomings of the market economy and the onset of unemployment, poverty, social deprivation and food insecurity. The relationship between the market system and the SSE has been a feature of Pacific socioeconomic life and human security systems. This syncretic relationship can be very complex and involves a dynamic synergy between a series of life narratives and worldviews, such as:

- subsistence production and capitalist exchange;
- individual ownership and collective rights to land and property;
- traditional cosmological narratives and Christian ethos; and
- indigenous episteme and globalised commodified knowledge (Ratuva 2014).

These narratives are not necessarily opposing binaries or dichotomous. Rather, they have created nuanced patterns of relationships over time, where various norms and practices oscillate across the cultural 'boundaries' creating new forms of cultural synthesis, accommodation and symbiosis. At the same time there can be conditions between these narratives, or more dominant values may prevail in certain contexts. Contrary to the deterministic deficit assumption that Pacific Islanders are helpless and always vulnerable to external and global forces beyond their control, the reality is that – despite their marginal position in the global neo-liberal order – Pacific Islanders are still able to make conscious and rational choices in relation to both Western and indigenous modes of production, governance and innovation – as part of their adaptation and resilience strategies. These choices become much more urgent and distinct in times of crises as people become desperate to decide on the best priorities for their circumstances and available resources to support these priorities and responses.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, transformative effects of communal choices and expressions of community power provided the basis for SSE. Due to the dramatic demise in the availability of cash, an urgent task was to resuscitate the practice of barter system or what ethnographers refer to as generalised reciprocity. The regional barter system initiative started in Fiji as the 'Barter for Better Fiji' project and the idea spread to Tonga, Samoa, Vanuatu, New Zealand and other PICs (Williams 2020). Tora describes the situation in the Guardian article of 8 May 2020 thus:

The barter system is experiencing a resurgence across the Pacific with similar Facebook pages in Tonga – 'Barter for Change' – two in Samoa 'Barter for Better Samoa' and 'Le Barter Samoa' with just over 1,000

members – and one in Vanuatu ‘Barter for Nambawan Life Vanuatu’ – as the island nations are beginning to face economic difficulties due to Covid-19 (Tora 2020:1).

Since May 2020, this barter system has expanded in geographical reach and demographic participation and is now a major component of many PICs’ economies. The traditional version of this reciprocity system in Fiji is referred to as *veisa*, which literally means to pair up, exchange or balance up. Various forms of reciprocity were common throughout the Pacific. For example, the Kula trade connected different islands and communities in PNG, while trade on red bird feathers, mats, canoes and other artifacts existed for centuries among Fiji, Tonga and Samoa.

While the barter system still exists in some form or other in various Pacific communities, the ‘new’ initiative eclipsed this system taking centre stage as a dominant mode of exchange and also utilising virtual space as the arena for digital exchange, rather than face to face negotiations. Interested buyers and sellers would publicise their intents online to which people would respond with deals being settled virtually and the actual exchange of goods taking place face to face. Some examples of these forms of exchange are outlined below in the 8 May article in the Guardian:

Two piglets for a pre-loved kayak, a taxi fare in exchange for fresh produce, hot cross buns for online tutoring, an old carpet for a professional photography session, vegetable seedlings for homemade pies, and offers to have backyards cleaned for prayers. These are just a few examples of the hundreds of barter trades that are taking place across Fiji since a Facebook page ‘Barter for Better Fiji’ was created a few weeks ago in response to sharp falls in employment due to coronavirus. The page now has more than 100,000 members, in a country of just under 900,000 people (Tora 2020:1).

The use of new virtual technology and a modern range of goods has transformed the *veisa*, based on small-scale communal exchange, into a mass exchange system facilitated by modern digital infrastructure. Rather than just calling this ‘barter exchange’ – which would confuse it with traditional exchange systems such as *veisa* – I propose to call it adapted virtual barter exchange (AVBE).

AVBE has a number of advantages. Firstly, it can be used transculturally without much ethical or normative restriction. All ethnic groups have adopted AVBE in Fiji as a common cultural norm in these times of economic difficulties and uncertainties. Secondly, because of AVBE’s reliance on social media for community connection, the process of negotiation and exchange can be instant across geographical boundaries. In a population with high mobile phone coverage such as Fiji, the AVBE system can spread quickly encompassing a large group of people within a very short time. Thirdly, direct financial input is minimal, in fact in many cases, there is none, which augurs well for traditional subsistence-based communities such as those in the Pacific. Fourthly, AVBE is inclusive and equitable in terms of the power of the traders, gender and socioeconomic status. The system unpacks and reconfigures the unequal and often exploitative class divide and gender division of labour – characteristic of the capitalist system. Each trader has the power to negotiate, determine the value of goods

and services exchanged and the right to engage in the actual exchange. The value of goods is determined by their social function as seen by both parties rather than actual ‘market’ value. Lastly, AVBE is underpinned by the moral virtues of trust and social solidarity – using communal capital rather than finance as the basis for building networks, communication and exchange.

By following the trading and discussions online, it is quite apparent that in some ways the AVBE has created a strong trans-ethnic, class and system bond which has nurtured a powerful social solidarity connection between people within communities. Through months of evolution and innovation, the AVBE has become more than just an economic activity – expanding and deepening – to become an economic and social system of production, exchange, networking and cultural transformation.

Apart from AVBE, other forms of SSE activities have mushroomed in response to COVID-19, which – to name a few – include:

- the ‘green thumb’ model for local farming;
- rise beyond the reef economic empowerment for women in rural communities;
- incubator and seed funding for start-ups by those losing their source of income;
- smart farms Fiji;
- Pacific Blue farming; and
- alternative communities trade (UNDP 2020b).

Land is an important part of the social and solidarity economy because of its socio-cultural and economic value. It has become a sought after entity – not as a form of real estate capital – but as a key aspect of community livelihood. Communally owned land in most Pacific communities has acted as a social safety net during times of economic difficulties, enabling ordinary people to access and utilise land for farming. Had land been privately owned, as some neoliberal economists have been advocating for a long time in the Pacific (Duncan 2014), this would have been a very different story.

Community-driven innovations such as AVBE are the basis of the emerging SSE which provides an efficient social safety net for thousands of Pacific peoples across the world’s largest ocean. SSE is based on the utilisation of local communal capital to expand the depth and reach of the social safety net. The significance of aspects of communal capital such as kinship based social networks, reciprocal goods exchange, collective labour, group rights, cultural connections, common ethical principles and shared intellectual property are important human factors which drive and sustain the AVBE as an example of SSE.

## Conclusion: Rethinking human security

One of the most durable lessons COVID-19 has taught Pacific communities is the need to look inwards, utilise existing communal capital and develop community based resilience in response to threats to their human security. The pandemic has literally decimated the core of the market

economy such as tourism in many PICs which has impacted dramatically on people's wellbeing forcing people to think about alternative systems of exchange, production and means of livelihood.

This paper has provided a snapshot of how human security of Pacific communities has been impacted by the pandemic and how communities have resorted to mitigating strategies rooted in their sociocultural systems of adaptation and building resilience. Over the years, Pacific communities have engaged with the market economy and their traditional SSE in a syncretic manner, and have been selective in using aspects of both systems to suit their purposes in a dynamic and conscious way. This has developed a sense of resilience which has enabled Pacific communities to adapt to dramatic transformation brought about by natural disasters and human induced crises. When COVID-19 struck, many of these communities were in a position to mobilise their communal capital to respond to the socio-economic impacts of the health calamity. An example of this was the organisation of the AVBE which combined both traditional concepts of reciprocity and the capitalist strategy of virtual marketing and networking. The result is a multipurpose and functional system, which combines both economic redistribution and social solidarity, underpinned by the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion. An important component of SSE is land utilisation to provide for family food security. Land – often defined as a commodity in the capitalist discourse – is now seen as a safety net for community wellbeing. Other projects associated with land and the SSE have mushroomed across the PICs as communities become conscious of the need to utilise their communal cultural capital in a world where commercial capital can no longer provide for their basic needs.

These dynamic developments and creative initiatives have made us rethink human security. The conventional view is that external intervention in the form of humanitarian aid, social protection programs and expert strategic thinking are required to address the situation of 'vulnerable' communities such as those in PICs. This dependency approach has been brought into question by COVID-19 which has provided conditions for rethinking the significance of SSE as a basis for addressing basic human security issues such as poverty, unemployment, hunger and lack of income. Harnessing the power of communal capital – such as the interconnecting synergies between reciprocal systems of trade, kinship networks, collective labour and skills, social and spiritual relationship to land and environment and connection with the ancestral and wider cosmology – provide a lifeline to the PICs' longterm human security issues. Even if the market economy does not deliver the goods, the SSE will still form the basis of people's livelihoods – in bad and good times.

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## Reframing security in Pacific Island Countries and Territories<sup>1</sup>

*Christian Girard and Sara N Amin, University of the South Pacific and  
Daniel Watson, Queensland University of Technology*

(In)security in Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) has been subject to neocolonialist framings of small, remote areas in ‘need of help’ from larger powers – ideas that have been challenged by Pacific peoples who emphasise the vastness, global significance and influence, connections, and strengths found in indigenous knowledge, relations and practices (Hau’ofa 2008). There is a need to reframe security in PICTs to take into account contexts and interconnectedness, and encompasses human and environmental security.

### Aligning local and global priorities

In security studies, there has been a tendency to separate domestic and external security threats and prioritise the latter. Concerns about global security threats motivate countries with stronger economies to engage with PICTs in order to assist with setting their security agendas and ensure alignment with external priorities. Australia, New Zealand, the US, China, and Japan have all influenced and helped to develop the security agendas of several PICTs (Fry and Tarte 2015). It could be argued that domestic security challenges are becoming blurred with regional and global external security considerations, particularly so with PICTs where domestic and external security issues are often linked in both direct and complex ways to global issues, such as climate change, often perceived as the most important security threat currently faced by the region. For example, water security, usually considered a domestic issue, is a national issue in the Pacific given the limited access to fresh water supplies and the challenge of waste disposal (Manton 2014). Climate change is exacerbating water and food security issues in the Pacific. Chand and Taupo (2020) argue the nature and scope of climate change as a security threat in the PICTs include the potential loss of sovereignty and nationhood, making the common distinction between domestic and external security inadequate.

PICTs continue to find themselves in situations where the actions of their geopolitical allies are often in direct conflict with their security needs. As an example, during the most recent Pacific Islands Forum meeting in August 2019, Tuvalu and other PICTs articulated the urgency of climate change for their security. In response, Australia pledged AUD 500 million to fight climate change in PICTs, while simultaneously expressing an unwillingness to examine its use of coal, seabed mining and extractive industries as major contributing factors to climate change, not to mention voicing strong concerns about China’s growing influence (Clarke 2019). This type of conflicting dynamic is common, as highlighted by what Glover (2012) defines as ‘Australia’s Policy Paradox’ on fossil fuels and carbon emissions; what Barrett, Kurian and Wright (2015) refer to as the ‘Contradictory Politics of New Zealand’s Climate Change Policies in the Pacific’; and what Dvorak (2020) describes in relation to the US’ nuclear agenda in the region. These actions and policies not only contradict the very discourse of many allies supporting the PICTs, but come into conflict with PICTs’ own security agenda.

A key issue here is the tendency to separate different types of securities from each other as though they were not intertwined. For example, Elliott (2015:11) points out that environmental security tends to be ‘divorced’ from human security:

The concept of environmental security, on the other hand, has become increasingly divorced from its potentially heterodox and critical roots in human security. Rather it has been captured by an orthodoxy that focuses primarily on non-traditional threats to traditional referents (i.e., the state) and that increasingly perceives ‘environmental security’ as a synonym for the threat multiplier dimensions of climate change. Rather than empowering a people-centred approach that places emancipation at the centre of human/environmental security, the author argues (following Mason and Zeitoun) that this has foreclosed rather than protected human freedom and dignity.

This is particularly important and problematic for PICTs as the international agenda and environmental movement sometimes neglects the impact on livelihoods and the socio-economic challenges and needs of vulnerable populations see (Forsyth et al. 1998) even though it is acknowledged that environmental security and sustainable development are linked and are also key to poverty reduction.

The crucial point is that climate change is about much more than traditional environmental concerns with parks, pollution, preservation, and population. According to those who specify climate change in terms of national or human security, it is a much more important issue, potentially leading to major social disruptions and possibly wars, and hence a much higher policy priority (Dalby 2015:83).

The reality of geopolitical power at the international level has often meant that PICTs are inclined to adopt an agenda dominated by external powers that:

- does not necessarily correspond to their main priorities and concerns;
- continues to ignore the connections between environmental security, human security and freedom from violence and war; and
- remains with powers and centres outside of their direct control and authority.

As an example, according to Schoeffel (2020), external powers utilise aid and development mechanisms to influence and prioritise gender equality in political and economic institutions within PICTs. The context-specific needs of women and sexual minorities in the region are often not taken into account by these external actors in either agenda-setting and implementation processes. As a result, interventions can reinforce gender inequalities, delegitimise policies and laws designed to support women and sexual minorities, and even produce additional violence and insecurity against these groups (Bull et al. 2020).

However, successful management of and response to certain issues are beyond regional and local powers and lie more at the global level. If priorities are not aligned, the global impact and activities of major global players, especially in relation to climate change, can counter the efforts of the PICTs themselves, highlighting once more the importance of cooperation.

This does not minimise the impact and influence PICTs can have to influence the international and global agenda. PICTs' success in mobilising against nuclear testing in the 1980s testifies to their leadership and capacity. In fact, Dornan (2020) and Dvorak (2020) highlight that the scale and urgency of the security threat posed by climate change in the Pacific has created an important movement through regional bodies that underscores the need to challenge the status quo and re-think our model of economic development and economic security, our frameworks of responsibility and accountability, and to reconfigure power relations.

## Reconfiguring power relationships

The focus on security and vulnerability has increased interest in resilience. Resilience can be understood as the

capacity and means to cope with risks, shocks, and stress (Sirven 2007) or to 'bounce back' after a shock or crises (Boas and Rothe 2016).

Resilience discourse stresses rationales and practices such as adaptation to risk, shared responsibility, and self-capacity to achieve human security. In line with such a discourse, empowerment of vulnerable communities by funding adaptation projects in the global South became reconsidered as a part of a broader security strategy.

This resilience discourse tends to produce a devolvement from the state providing security to communities, individuals, the private sector and civil society (Chmutina, Lizarralde, Dainty and Bosher 2016) bearing this responsibility. As Dinnen (2020) argues, while privatisation of security can produce and support innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic opportunity, it can simultaneously increase insecurities by entrenching existing power inequalities and undermining the legitimacy of state actors. Most PICTs comprise jurisdictions spread across multi-island territories with porous borders and limited capacities to protect against crime and other security threats. This necessitates coordination and collaboration among local, regional, and international stakeholders to minimise regional risks and to allow for applicable responses to immediate and perceived threats (Watson and Dinnen 2020).

There is however, a parallel resilience and empowerment discourse oriented towards transforming the conditions that produced the insecurities in the first place (Tschakert 2009). In this discourse, notions of responsibility and accountability are centred on those who have produced the insecurities. For example, Oels (2015:189–190) argues that the discourse that focuses on resilience and migration as a result of climate change, 'depoliticizes the issue of climate change in a radical way' and contributes to 'legitimizing the displacement of millions of people', taking away the responsibility of industrialised countries to reduce emissions. Refusing to disconnect the causes of climate change from the solutions proposed is an important act of discursive resistance that aligns with the position and reactions of PICT leaders as highlighted by Chand and Taupo (2020). Dvorak (2020) also argues this in relation to the Marshall Islands' continued efforts for justice beyond simple monetary compensation from the ravaging effects of nuclear testing.

Efforts to relocate responsibility can be seen in different types of activity throughout the Pacific. For example, in 2014, the Pacific Climate Warriors Campaign, involving 30 Pacific Islanders and hundreds of Australians, used kayaks and traditionally built canoes to occupy the harbour and turn away 10 of the 11 coal ships set to collect their cargo from Newcastle, Australia. This very material and symbolic action was explicitly designed to make visible the 'connections between the actions of the Australian fossil fuel industry and the impacts that anthropogenic climate change is having on many Pacific Islands' (Fair 2015:58). Another recent example is the Pacific Island Students Fighting Climate Change (PISFCC) who are currently pressing Pacific leaders to bring up the issue with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and ask for an 'advisory opinion on the obligations of states under international law



to protect the rights of present and future generations against the adverse effects of climate change' (Vanuatu Climate Action Network, 2019).

In these examples, resilience and empowerment are located in radically different worldviews that people can bring to deal with global climate change and environmental security problems. Indigenous customs that emphasise connectivity, interrelatedness, and responsibility in relation to both people/communities and the environment are central to what PICTs and Pacific communities are asserting. These require going beyond extractive practices and technological solutions to reduce environmental insecurity and realising that cultivating the resilience to deal with change and insecurity will require re-ordering the current global political and economic regime (Mar 2016; Hau'ofa 1994).

Identifying 'traditional' systems as potential sites of resilience can also be found in discussions around food security. While there are many policy efforts at INGO, governmental and media/civil society levels focusing on raising awareness of traditional food systems and practices, such efforts tend to fall back on individualising responsibility for the provision of food security. However, for traditional food security systems to be viable and sustainable, one cannot ignore the current causes of food insecurity in the PICTs brought about by colonisation, neoliberal globalisation, and environmental degradation linked to climate change. Again, resilience and empowerment located in tradition or community participation can only be sustainable and meaningful in the context of re-configuration of power relations.

The modernisation discourse, globalised and imposed through colonialism and as well as the implementation of multiple international development projects, centres the citizen-state relationship as the primary relationship to order behaviour. All other relationships (religious, cultural, gender) are meant to be secondary and subordinated to the relationship to the state, to ensure the security of both the state and its subjects. However, this approach has produced many types of insecurities, including through violence used by states against specific populations to subordinate alternative identity and community groups (Castells 2011). In addition, neoliberal globalisation has not only left the state unable (or unwilling) to provide for the economic and health security of its population, it has also weakened the ties that could facilitate security outside of the state. (see Carnegie and King 2020). As Ratuva (2014) argues in relation to understanding social protection in the Pacific, the modernisation discourse has also created a deficit in thinking about security provision. By locating relationships beyond the state as both subordinate and often problematic, socio-cultural relationships and communities are ignored as a potential source of security enhancement. Yet, as Amin and Girard (2020), Watson and Dinnen (2020) and Forsyth (2020) show, these non-state relationships located in faith, *wantokism*, *kastom* and other cultural communities have been central in PICTs to ensure (public) security.

Central to many key tenets of Pacific ideas of governance is the ability to take the individual not as an abstract citizen stripped of their identities and relationships, but instead embedded in relationships. In such a perspective, resilience will not be found in the individual or

vulnerable community forced to come up with their own solutions and adaptations, but instead from resources and knowledge that can be mobilised because of the relationships and interconnectedness between individuals, (local, regional and global) communities and the state. This suggests that instead of marginalising or excluding non-state relationships and identities in efforts to reduce gender (or other) insecurities, it is necessary to take them into account both in recognising their role in producing insecurities and in their potential to rectify them. The key here is to draw on context-specific resources (leadership, relationships, ideas, and discourses) that challenge the reification of culture, tradition, and identity as monolithically patriarchal and/or exclusive of certain ideas.

### **(In)securities in the time of COVID**

The impact of the COVID pandemic has further compounded regional insecurities. While most PICTs have successfully managed to control the spread of COVID-19 in their communities, mitigating measures such as lockdowns, are having serious impacts on their economies and the livelihoods of their peoples, particularly in countries dependent on tourism.

One major challenge is that there are no swathes of tourists waiting for borders to re-open to visit these places *en masse* and that the pandemic in these countries may tame the demand and enthusiasm even further if the health situation appears risky or out of control. Even if PICTs were willing to accept the risks and trade-offs of re-opening to regular tourism (without extended quarantines or other requirements that may limit appeal or demand), there is no guarantee that this will bring the desired levels of tourists required to boost their economies in these difficult times. Hence, PICTs may end up trading relative security from COVID for greater health risks by exposing their populations and their health system for small potential economic gains from international tourism.

While a handful of economically wealthy countries have already pre-ordered the majority of vaccines to be produced worldwide, many countries may end up having a very hard time getting them, particularly countries with less economic power and financial leverage. This is where the current geopolitical tensions over influence in the Pacific may play to the PICTs' advantage, as Australia has committed (in principle) to securing vaccines for the PICTs – an action seen by some as an attempt to gain points in the ongoing war of influence between China and Australia within the region (Butler 2020). The relatively small populations of most PICTs also make this promise more achievable and affordable in practical terms. 'Vaccine diplomacy' may therefore play a key role in the overall 'COVID-19 diplomacy' in PICTs, adding to other current strategic actions like budget support and the provision of medical supplies and equipment (Zhang 2020).

Finally, the economic crisis produced by the global pandemic has made sites of resilience in Pacific communities more visible. Ratuva (2014) argued the importance of recognising 'culture-based indigenous social protection systems used by subaltern Pacific communities as a means

of building resilience and developing adaptation strategies'. As he states: 'Far from being "failed", Pacific communities have over the years developed culture-based mechanisms, not captured in Western-based classificatory schemas, which provide them with resilience and adaptability in the face of neoliberalism and globalisation' (Ratuva 2014:42).

In particular, in the current situation, many Pacific communities have been able to draw on such culture-based mechanisms of reciprocity, relationality, care and responsibility to buffer the impact of loss of employment and wages (Kabutaulaka 2020). This speaks to the importance of looking beyond the state and formal institutions as a site of social protection. For many PICTs, this type of resilience also serves to buffer state responses. The pandemic-related strain placed on state-owned security service organisations across the region has revealed the disadvantages of relying on external support for day-to-day operations. It has also reinforced the resilience of organisations where strained financial resources, limited technical and logistic support, human resource shortfalls and limited physical resources affect but do not prevent service provision (Watson 2020). Moreover, transactional ideas embodied in the founding of the Barter for a Better Fiji, a Facebook-based bartering platform set up to respond to the loss of earnings and closure of services during the pandemic, and its replication across Oceania, points to the creativity with which communities have responded to the current crisis and the ways Pacific communities are modelling new ways of building security.

## Conclusion

If security and resilience are to be sustainable and ongoing, there is an urgent need to align local and global security priorities, as well as reconfigure the political economy of relationships, identities and 'traditions' as potential sources of resilience in security provision. In the context of the PICTs, contemporary security crises, a revitalisation of indigenous worldviews and knowledge (Smith 2013), a push for Southern theorisation (Connell 2014), and technologies that facilitate collective action and solidarity (Titifanue et. al. (2017) have created an emerging opportunity to produce new ways of reconfiguring power relationships between different states, as well as, and perhaps more importantly, between communities and states within and beyond national borders.

## Note

- <sup>1</sup> Parts of this chapter have been reproduced with the permission of Routledge from:

Amin, SN, C Girard and D Watson 2020, 'Security, resilience and resistance in the PICs: Aligning priorities and relocating responsibility', in SN Amin, D Watson and C Girard (eds), *Mapping Security in the Pacific: A focus on context, gender and organisational culture*, Routledge, 231–243.

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# Australia and security in the Pacific Islands

*James Batley, The Australian National University*

The Pacific Islands have traditionally been seen as impinging on Australia's national security in two distinct but intertwined ways: first by serving (potentially or actually, willingly or unwillingly) as a platform or vector through which hostile external parties might threaten Australia; and second, by engaging Australian interests because of their own internal instability and vulnerability. Against this background, Australia faced a range of commonly-cited challenges in the region in 2020, including policy gaps that exist between Australia and many Pacific Island countries on issues such as climate change, and the role and influence of China in the region.

The Australian government's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper set out a vision of 'helping to integrate Pacific countries into the Australian and New Zealand economies and our security institutions', something it described as 'essential to the long-term stability and economic prospects of the Pacific'. More recently, Australia's 2020 Defence Strategic Update outlined Australia's aim not only to work with its neighbours and partners, but to 'shape our environment' and to 'deter actions against our interests' against an array of threats and potential threats.<sup>1</sup> While in no way suggesting that these statements represent the totality of Australia's current approach in the region, it is nevertheless helpful to consider them as part of Australia's broader approach for enhanced engagement with the Pacific Islands region, or its 'Pacific Step-up'.

Both sets of statements are consistent with long-standing Australian anxieties about the ways in which the Pacific Islands bear on Australia's national security that are noted above. Even so, both also suggest a change of *tone* – at least – compared to the way the Pacific islands region has traditionally been considered in Australian policy statements. Both statements come against the background of a changing strategic environment in the region and in particular the rise of China: the Strategic Update is notably frank in describing the 'deterioration' in Australia's strategic environment in recent years (The Pacific chapter of the Foreign Policy White Paper, drafted in less strident times, referred rather more coyly to 'increasing competition for influence' in the region). At the same time, it would be a misreading of Australian policy to see the language in either of these two key statements as driven solely by China's rise in the region; both the Foreign Policy White Paper and the Strategic Update explicitly describe ways in which the internal stability and development trajectories of Pacific Island countries (at least those closest to Australia geographically, in particular) continue to have implications for Australia's national security and to demand policy responses.

## Challenges

It has become a commonplace observation that Australia's relations with the Pacific have come under stress in recent

years due to a range of factors. The issue of climate change is an obvious starting point; although there have been tensions between Australia and its Pacific neighbours on this issue for many years, it is clear that they have become much more acute of late. The Pacific Islands Forum's 2018 Boe Declaration, which describes climate change as 'the greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific', is often held out as emblematic of, and even in some senses as bringing to a head, the gap between Australian and Pacific island perceptions and policy in this area (see for instance Fry 2019). Differences over the issue of climate change at the 2019 Pacific Islands Forum leaders meeting were particularly acute, and received widespread media coverage at the time.

Equally, many Pacific island countries do not share Australia's geostrategic outlook or anxieties, or at least aren't prepared to say so publicly. For some, this is a matter of foreign policy doctrine as a number of Pacific island countries explicitly espouse 'friends to all, enemies to none' foreign policies. Three countries of key interest to Australia (Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, and Fiji) are members of the Non-Aligned Movement, underlining their desire to be seen as independent actors internationally.

Some leaders, such as Samoa's Prime Minister Tuilaepa, have expressed scepticism over the relevance of concepts that are important to Australia, such as the Indo-Pacific, arguing that such constructs simply miss the point in the Pacific, and do not reflect Pacific Island priorities. In a 2018 speech, Tuilaepa declared:

under the flagship of our Blue Pacific identity, we are building a collective voice amidst the geopolitical din on the existential threat of climate change that looms for all of our Pacific family.... The renewed vigour with which a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy' is being advocated and pursued leaves us with much uncertainty. For the Pacific there is a real risk of privileging 'Indo' over the 'Pacific' (Tuilaepa 2018).

Tuilaepa has also spoken on behalf of many Pacific Islanders in expressing concern that they were being asked to choose sides in the burgeoning strategic contest between the United States (and its allies) and China, and in doing so risked impairing their autonomy and agency as sovereign states. He was quoted in a 2019 interview as saying 'Their [i.e. Australia and its allies] enemies are not our enemies.' In a similar vein, Forum Secretary General Dame Meg Taylor stated in early 2019:

I reject the terms of the dilemma which presents the Pacific with a choice between a China alternative and our traditional partners. Unfortunately, this framing remains the dominant narrative in the public debate about our region in the context of today's geostrategic competition... In general, Forum members view China's increased actions in the region as a positive development, one that offers greater options for financing and

development opportunities – both directly in partnership with China, and indirectly through the increased competition in our region (Taylor 2019 (I)).

Taylor's studied even-handedness in the face of rising geostrategic tension in the region has led her to be more than obliquely critical of aspects of Australia's approach in the region, as in another 2019 speech where she declared:

we continue to observe a multitude of security measures and initiatives introduced in the region, including the expansion of the naval bases at Lombrum on Manus Island and in northern Australia. Reportedly, there is also a proposal for a naval base at Stirling Island in Western Solomon Islands. Perhaps, an apt observation is that of Vanuatu's Foreign Minister the Honourable Ralph Regenvanu who has questioned this 'increasing militarisation of the (Pacific)' (Taylor 2019 (II)).

This survey of Pacific views is cursory and selective at best but it nevertheless illustrates a gap that undoubtedly exists between Australia's security perceptions and ambitions and that of key Pacific Island countries and regional leaders. Indeed, some (e.g., Fry 2019) have even argued that Australia's policies have been counterproductive, driving countries such as Papua New Guinea, Fiji, and Samoa into even closer engagement with China. So is this gap unbridgeable? To what extent does it diminish Australia's ability to pursue its security interests in the Pacific Islands, and in particular, its objectives of integration, shaping and deterring?

## Challenges in context

The first answer to this question should be to note that disagreements and tensions between Australia and countries in the region are hardly a new phenomenon. Indeed, for those with long enough memories, this might almost be seen as situation normal as there never was a golden age of perfect comity between Australia and its Pacific Island neighbours to contrast to today's state of affairs. Noisy headlines have long been a staple in the region's relations with its large neighbour. Disagreements should not necessarily be seen as undermining key relationships or put forward as definitive indicators of declining influence.

Second, while Pacific Island countries may be united at a regional level on the question of climate change, it is much less clear that this issue is a deal-breaker in Australia's bilateral relationships with Pacific Island countries. Indeed, there would seem to be little evidence to support the case that climate change stands in the way of productive bilateral relationships. If much of the region's talking is done at the regional level, much of its business is done at the bilateral level.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, not all Pacific Island countries adopt a tone of moral equivalence on the question of China's role in the region. As has been noted by more than one commentator, Palau's former President Remengesau has explicitly emphasised that his country's:

steadfast reliability makes Palau and the other Freely Associated States natural allies in the Pentagon's new Indo-Pacific strategy, a plan to counter Chinese

expansionism and its militarisation of islands in the region' (Quoted in Firth 2020).

In September 2020, Remengesau was reported (PAC-NEWS 2020) as calling for the United States to establish 'a regular US military presence' in his country (one wonders what the Forum Secretary General made of this). Former PNG Prime Minister Rabbie Namaliu was recently asked whether PNG might ultimately have to choose between Australia and China. His response, while emphasising his country's traditional 'friends to all' foreign policy, was that in the end 'he did not believe it would be difficult for [PNG] to make that choice' (Nicholson 2020).

Third, while it is true that Australia's broader geostrategic interests in the Pacific are not explicitly addressed in the Boe Declaration, at the same time, they are not necessarily inconsistent with it. The Declaration acknowledges 'a dynamic geopolitical environment leading to an increasingly crowded and complex region' but it does not take an overt position on that other than in carefully-worded language (e.g., respecting 'the sovereign right of every Member to conduct its national affairs free of external interference and coercion'; reaffirming 'the right of Members to individually and collectively address security issues and concerns'; and reaffirming 'the importance of the rules-based international order founded on the UN Charter, adherence to relevant international law, and resolution of international disputes by peaceful means'). To acknowledge that Australia has different security interests or priorities compared to those of Pacific Island countries (whether considered individually or expressed collectively in statements such as the Boe Declaration) is not to deny the legitimacy of either set of interests or priorities. So it would be an over-reading to see the Boe Declaration as antithetical to Australian interests in the region, or to the pursuit of those interests.

In fact the evidence suggests that the Boe Declaration has helped to provide a common language and vocabulary that Australia is able to use in its already extensive dealings with Pacific Islands countries. Australia now routinely references the Boe Declaration in its official documentation. The delegate handbook for the first Joint Heads of Pacific Security meeting (hosted by Australia on 9–10 October 2019 in Brisbane) carried the Boe Declaration in full. The Strategic Update cites the Boe Declaration, as does the PNG–Australia Comprehensive Strategic and Economic Partnership concluded in August 2020. The recently-established Australia Pacific Security College (PSC) states that its 'activities will be guided by the expanded concept of security under the Boe Declaration, and will seek to make a meaningful contribution to its implementation'. Australia does not deny climate change in the Pacific, that it is an issue of 'greatest concern' (DFAT 2020) to Pacific Island governments and people, or that climate change risks becoming increasingly a source and driver of instability in the region (Australian Government 2016). Given Australia's abiding anxiety about instability and vulnerability in the Pacific, it could hardly do otherwise.

Critics object that Australia's domestic policies on climate change mean that such references merely pay lip-service to the Boe Declaration (see for example Kabutaulaka

and Teaiwa 2019), or that there is an irreconcilable incoherence between Australia's positions domestically and externally. Even if that were true in the case of climate change, the Boe Declaration is about more than climate change. Its description of 'an expanded concept of security' includes reference to areas such as humanitarian assistance, health security, resource security (e.g., fisheries), transnational crime and cybersecurity. This range of security concerns is, in turn, reflected in the national security strategies that have been issued by Pacific Island countries (Samoa and Vanuatu) in the past two years (and in Papua New Guinea's earlier national security strategy, issued in 2013). These are all areas where Australia remains deeply engaged, at both the bilateral and regional levels, as the Pacific's leading partner through security agencies such as the ADF or AFP or through the regular aid program. Indeed, COVID-19 has reminded Pacific Island countries of their stake in Australia's role as a key partner in the areas of health security. Australia is also easily the region's major partner in another critical area of human security – gender – even though the Boe Declaration is notoriously silent on this issue.

### Australian assets and initiatives

Before noting recent initiatives, it is worth recalling the extent of Australia's existing assets in the region. This is as much a matter of relationships and networks as it is of financial resources. Those assets include the most intense personal investment by an Australian Prime Minister in his regional counterparts at any time in the post-colonial period. They include by far the most extensive diplomatic network across the region, with resident Australian Embassies and High Commissions established in every Forum member; defence representation and cooperation programs in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Kiribati, RMI, FSM, and Palau; and Australian Federal Police (AFP) representation and/or police development programs throughout the region.<sup>3</sup> Those assets also include Australian membership of key regional organisations and networks including the Forum itself, the Pacific Community, the Forum Fisheries Agency, the South Pacific Regional Environment Program, the South Pacific Defence Ministers Meeting, the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, the Pacific Transnational Crime Network, and the Pacific Immigration Development Community, to name the most prominent. To be sure, this catalogue does not tell us anything about the *quality* of Australian engagement with those institutions and individuals in Pacific Island countries that are relevant to Australia's security concerns and objectives, nor indeed about the quality of coordination among the various Australian agencies involved. Even so, it does underline, at the very least, the extent of Australia's engagement and reach in the region, something that is unmatched by any of the region's other development partners, whether traditional or 'emerging'.

That said, in considering Australia's assets in the region, it is also worth recalling the significant roles played by its allies and friends including New Zealand, the United States, France, Japan, and the United Kingdom. Each country is working to increase its presence and activity

in the region in ways that are mostly consistent with Australia's interests.

Australia's Pacific Step-up has seen a range of new policy measures in the area of security that can be seen as answering the imperative of integrating and shaping the region. These include the Pacific Fusion Centre, announced in 2018 (Payne 2018) and aimed at providing a more robust and integrated flow of information to Pacific governments, particularly in supporting maritime domain awareness; the aforementioned Australia Pacific Security College which, apart from building capacity, aims to build and strengthen networks among officials responsible for security policy across the region; and the Joint Heads of Pacific Security meeting which met for the first time in October 2019 and was hosted by Australia (Defence 2019). The latter initiative brought together police, border management, customs, immigration and defence organisations from Forum member countries (and Timor-Leste) for the first time to consider the range of security issues facing the region.

There may be some concern at the regional level that these initiatives are not being undertaken under the direct aegis of the Forum, even if the Forum Secretariat has been engaged extensively on their design and work plans. There was also reportedly some concern at the bilateral level, over the course of 2019, that initiatives under the Step-up were being rolled out too quickly for Pacific administrations to absorb. If so, COVID-19 has served to slow down the pace at which initiatives such as these can be implemented and further developed. Even so, they are all tokens of Australia's aim to show ongoing leadership in the region. They illustrate Australia's convening power in the region, and its ability to resource initiatives both in financial and in personnel terms. None of them is focused explicitly on China or the broader geopolitical issues confronting the region: if there is a sub-text to these various initiatives, it is about fostering a regional community of policymakers, one in which Australia is deeply and naturally embedded.

Building such a community is necessarily a long-term endeavour and will require strategic persistence and patience. In the short term, though, recent history provides numerous examples to suggest that Australia is successfully prosecuting its 'traditional' security interests in the region, as seen in Australia forestalling a proposal for Chinese-owned company Huawei to build an undersea cable from Solomon Islands to Australia in 2017; heading off what may have been a Chinese attempt to establish a permanent base in Vanuatu in 2018,<sup>4</sup> securing Fiji's approval to redevelop Blackrock Camp into a regional training hub for police and peacekeepers, and (recent wobbles notwithstanding) Papua New Guinea's agreement for Australia to lead the redevelopment of Lombrum Naval Base in Manus. The 2019 diplomatic switch by Solomon Islands and Kiribati from Taiwan to China were more equivocal developments in terms of Australian interests in the region, though it should be acknowledged that Australia, unlike the US, did not set out to prevent Solomon Islands from making this switch. Kiribati's switch seems to have come as a surprise to Australia but it is more the surprise than the switch itself that might be seen as a setback for Australia.

It is of course artificial to think about Australia's 'hard security' agenda in the region in isolation from broader policy initiatives under the Pacific Step-up. The aid program as broadly conceived and the increasing number of Pacific Islanders taking opportunities to work in Australia both serve Australia's longer term interests in the Pacific as well as promoting development and building capacity in the region. And beyond this, non-government and people-to-people linkages and relationships between Australia and many countries in the Pacific remain robust and growing (Batley 2017). These too must count as assets in any accounting of Australia's ability to pursue its long-term goals in the region.

## Conclusion

In the contemporary cliché, the Pacific region is clearly more crowded and contested. It can't be denied that significant gaps exist between Australian and Pacific Islands' understandings of and approaches to security in the region. Differences on climate change in particular remain serious. But those gaps and differences should be kept in perspective when considering Australia's place in the region. In recent times Australia has shown repeatedly that it is able to draw on its assets in the region to protect and to prosecute its security interests, and that those assets are being enhanced through new initiatives.

From a longer-term point of view, the work of integrating, of shaping and of deterring in the region remains a work in progress. It cannot be said, at this stage, that the region conceives of itself as a fully-fledged security community. In a dynamic region, Australian governments will need to continue to push the boundaries of existing policy settings. There is plenty of work to do.

## Notes

- 1 The Strategic Update's geographic scope extends beyond the Pacific Islands, of course. As the Update makes clear, the Pacific Islands are a critically important part of that scope.
- 2 This appears to have been something of a concern to Forum Secretary General Dame Meg Taylor during the COVID-19 pandemic. In August 2020 she was quoted as encouraging 'Forum members to looking beyond their national boundaries, and for development partners to think beyond bilateralism' (Magick 2020).
- 3 Specifically, these efforts include bilateral development programs in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Samoa, Tonga, and Nauru, and regional development programs in Kiribati, Niue, Tuvalu, the Republic of Marshall Islands, Palau, Cook Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia.
- 4 While the details of this alleged arrangement remain obscure, it is surprising how ready many observers were to accept at face value denials issued at the time by both the Chinese and Vanuatu governments, as if that settled the matter.

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# Identity, national security and influence: The ‘Pacific Reset’ and shaping New Zealand’s relations with the Pacific islands

*Anna Powles, Massey University, New Zealand*

In 2018 the newly formed Labour-led coalition government launched the Pacific Reset. The Reset was New Zealand’s most notable foreign policy shift towards the Pacific islands region in decades and consequently steeped in expectation. The new government promised to lead change ‘rather than managing a modified status quo’ (Peters 2018a) and in Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern’s first foreign policy address, she forecasted the policy shift stating that, in the Pacific, ‘we can do better, and we will’ (Ardern 2018). Labelled the government’s ‘top foreign policy priority’, the strategy was extolled as representing a:

refreshed New Zealand approach to the Pacific region ... driven by our strong Pacific identity and interconnectedness with the region, coupled with the direct impact the Pacific’s stability and prosperity has on New Zealand’s national interests (MFAT 2019a).

The Reset’s primary objective was to serve as a policy framework or guide to reshape New Zealand’s relations with its Pacific partners and the region as a whole. Accordingly, the Reset reflected efforts to recalibrate New Zealand’s strategy towards the Pacific and signalled a potentially transformative approach towards the region that would prioritise partnership and emphasise mutual respect. The Cabinet Paper (2018) outlining the rationale for the Reset cited three drivers for New Zealand’s engagement in the Pacific islands region: New Zealand’s Pacific identity; national security; and shared prosperity. Significantly, the Reset signalled an effort to address those domestic policy settings which have implications for the Pacific (MFAT 2020:6).

Since the Reset’s inception, two inter-related questions have dominated. First, to what degree was the Reset inspired and influenced by geopolitical contestation and concerns about China’s rising influence in the Pacific? And second, to what extent does the Reset seek to address the persistent dilemma in both New Zealand domestic and foreign policy: what is New Zealand’s standing and place in the Pacific? Two years later, the Reset remains a core foreign policy objective for the second-term Ardern government and is likely to become increasingly central to New Zealand’s response to intensified geopolitical competition in the region. Through a survey of key policy documents, this chapter considers the ways in which two of the drivers – identity and national security – have informed the Reset. The chapter will conclude that influence lies at the nexus between the two drivers and that New Zealand will be increasingly called upon to exercise influence in an environment of geopolitical competition.

## The Pacific Reset

Growing dissatisfaction and concern with the highly transactional nature of New Zealand’s relations with the Pacific

led to calls in 2017 to review and reset New Zealand policies towards the Pacific (Powles and Powles 2017). Cabinet deliberations in early 2018 echoed the need for a ‘refreshed approach’ to New Zealand’s relations with the Pacific and stipulated that the strategy would include the following five elements: building deeper, more mature political partnerships with Pacific island countries, including by reinvesting in leadership diplomacy in the Pacific; ensuring New Zealand Government decision-making on domestic policies considered the implications for the Pacific islands region; and enhancing the effectiveness of Pacific regional organisations to better respond to shared challenges (Cabinet Paper 2018). The strategy also stated that New Zealand activities in the Pacific would be guided by five principles of engagement: understanding, friendship, mutual benefit, collective impact and sustainability (ibid).

From the outset, the official discourse consistently emphasised that the Reset reflected a sea change in New Zealand Government policy towards the Pacific. The Reset was described as a ‘reenergised approach’ and that New Zealand would move away ‘from a traditional donor-recipient relationship to one based on partnership, friendship and mutual benefit’ (MFAT 2019b:22). It claimed to reflect:

a fundamental change to how our government works that includes deeper collaboration with Pacific partner countries, greater coherence and connectivity between domestic and Pacific policy, more ambition for our Pacific development programme, and increased resources to use our voice and connections internationally to raise awareness for Pacific issues (ibid).

To achieve this the Reset initially had a strong domestic focus. Deepening Pacific policy across government required building the architecture within and across 32 government agencies to support ‘a cross-government commitment to Pacific issues’ (MFAT 2019a) and an ‘integrated approach to foreign policy’ (MFAT 2019c). This accompanied the expectation that the ‘heightened tempo of effort and investment across the State sector’ needed to ‘become the new normal for New Zealand’s Pacific engagement’ (MFAT 2019b:22). With the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) as lead agency, this included integrating development and diplomatic efforts into the purposefully created Pacific and Development Group in Wellington and the Pacific Connections office in Auckland.

The Reset was also accompanied by a significant budgetary increase of NZ\$714m (A\$661m), a 30 per cent increase, over four years to support diplomatic and development activities. Of New Zealand’s total aid budget, the increase of aid to the Pacific equates to approximately 60 per cent (around NZ\$1.331bn (A\$1.234bn)) over the 2018–21 period. Additional initiatives under the Reset included



the establishment of a NZ\$10m (A\$9.2m) Pacific Enabling Fund to support engagement with Pacific partners from cultural and sporting diplomacy, people to people links, to military cooperation activities and the launching of Pasifika TV at a cost of NZ\$10 million over three years. Moreover, superannuation requirements were removed allowing residents of the Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau to receive their pensions without spending the required five years in New Zealand when over the age of fifty.

The Reset also led to the expansion of New Zealand's diplomatic footprint in the Pacific. Ten new diplomatic posts were created in the Pacific (in Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Vanuatu, PNG, Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Honolulu) and four positions in Tokyo, Beijing, Brussels and New York to coordinate development policy and partnerships for the Pacific region. Leadership diplomacy initiatives resulted in two high-profile Pacific missions led by Ardern and Peters in 2018. In the first year there were 21 ministerial and parliamentary under-secretary level visits to Pacific countries and territories. This included the first ministerial-level attendance at a Forum Fisheries Agency Ministers meeting since 2009, the first ministerial visit to Tokelau since 2004, and, in 2019, the first visit by a New Zealand prime minister to Tokelau in 15 years. New Zealand also saw an increased tempo of visits from Pacific leaders and ministers in 2018 from eight countries and territories. Cabinet also approved a new policy framework to underpin New Zealand's engagement with the realm countries of the Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau.

## New Zealand's Pasifika/Pacific identity

New Zealand's Pacific identity narrative is contested, complicated, and arguably has greater currency internationally than within the region itself (Powles 2017). It is, however, a common anchor within official foreign policy – and increasingly domestic – discourse as New Zealand seeks to reconcile with questions of national identity. It is cited as a key driver for New Zealand's engagement with the Pacific that lays claim to New Zealand being a Polynesian country with greater interconnectedness between New Zealand, Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa, Tokelau and Tonga than any other countries in the world with the partial exception of Australia (Cabinet Paper 2018).

The identity narrative is driven by three factors: geography, its constitutional obligations towards the Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau, and its indigenous *tangata whenua* and its later migrant *tagata Pasifika* populations. New Zealand has a rapidly growing *tagata Pasifika* population with more than 40 different Pacific ethnic groups that together comprise the fourth largest major ethnic group, behind European, Māori and Asian ethnic groups (New Zealand Census 2013). By 2026, it is projected that New Zealand's Pacific population will have grown to 10 per cent of the total population, compared to 7.4 per cent in 2013 (Ministry for Pacific Peoples). Critically, *tagata Pasifika* are an increasingly powerful domestic constituency with the 2020 election resulting in the largest number of Pasifika ministers in cabinet (five in total) with Aupito Sio, the Minister of Pacific Peoples and Associate Minister of

Foreign Affairs, outside cabinet (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2020).

New Zealand's place in the Pacific and, by extension, its place in the world as a Pacific nation, has long been a source of debate. From the 1970s onwards, New Zealand became increasingly more aware of its Pacific connections, however, these connections were frequently framed in terms of influence and national interest – themes that not surprisingly remain present in contemporary discourse. The Kirk government (1972–1974), for example, pursued a proactive policy of engagement with the Pacific and directly linked New Zealand's international reputation with its regional influence (Ross 2016). The 1978 Defence Review pointed to the need to incorporate the fact that 'New Zealand is a Pacific country' into the formulation of defence policy.

In 2002, then Minister for Foreign Affairs and Pacific Affairs, Phil Goff, conflated identity with a form of stewardship stating that:

we no longer see ourselves as an isolated British outpost somehow misplaced at the bottom of the Pacific. We see ourselves as a Pacific nation with key responsibilities in the South Pacific (Goff 2002).

Goff later expanded on this asserting that the presence of a strong Pasifika community has enabled a 'unique interaction between New Zealand and the Pacific which gives us a sense of identity with and a greater ability to work alongside our Pacific neighbours' (ibid). In 2009 then foreign minister Murray McCully drew a direct link between identity and regional leadership stating that:

New Zealand is truly a Pacific nation, not just in terms of geography, but also in terms of our increasing Pasifika population...This rich demography gives New Zealand both a responsibility and a unique capacity to play a leadership role...in this region (McCully 2009).

Furthermore, successive reviews of New Zealand's relations with the Pacific have linked identity with national interest and regional leadership. The 1990 policy review, *Towards a Pacific Island Community*, stated that New Zealand was coming to terms with its place as a Pacific island nation and even suggested that New Zealand was perceived by the Pacific island countries as in, and of, the region. However, the report also warned that New Zealand did not necessarily understand the Pacific and should not presume to take a proprietary or colonial approach to Pacific Island affairs (NZG 1990).

The 2010 parliamentary review of New Zealand's relationships with the Pacific islands suggested that the close personal and family connections with the region distinguishes New Zealand from other countries that seek engagement in the region and in turn lends itself to a 'unique and intimate understanding of the region' (Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee 2010:12). The review made further claims that 'New Zealand is increasingly part of the regional fabric' and that 'key partners expect New Zealand to strongly support the maintenance of peace and stability in this region.' The 2020 inquiry into New Zealand's aid to the Pacific also reiterated the link between identity and national interest, stating that New Zealand's engagement in

the Pacific is driven by 'its strong Pacific identity and interconnectedness with the region' and combined with the 'direct effect that the stability and prosperity of the Pacific has on New Zealand's national interests' (Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee 2020:9).

The linking of identity with national interest has led to a sense of 'New Zealand exceptionalism and cultural capital' (Goldsmith 2017). Salesa (2017:6) challenges this by calling for greater recognition of:

the ways in which the Pacific drives the configuration of New Zealand's overseas priorities, its national defence, its view and understanding of the world, and indeed, how the Pacific inflates or amplifies New Zealand's importance to others around the world.

Furthermore, Salesa (ibid) argues that the Pacific is New Zealand's gateway to the world and 'why New Zealand matters in a way a small country of its size typically does not'. Moreover, McGhie argues that despite the rhetoric of 'New Zealand's *Pacificness*', the country has yet to fully address the complex nature of the problems facing Pacific states, which requires a change in attitudes as to how issues are approached.

## New Zealand's national security as a driver for engagement with the Pacific

The 'safeguarding of New Zealand's interests' is a primary driver of New Zealand's engagement with the Pacific (MFAT 2020:35). New Zealand's national security, it is argued, is 'directly affected by the Pacific's stability' (MFAT 2018). This includes contemporary security challenges, such as transnational organised crime, and increasingly, concerns about the rise of Chinese influence in the region and the destabilising impact of US–China strategic competition. As Dame Meg Taylor stated in mid-2017:

the geopolitical and development context of the Pacific has shifted and the region faces a range of external and internal factors that are acting to reshape it, including increasing plurality of regional actors, shifts in global power, and unmet development challenges.

That year then Prime Minister Bill English (2017) noted during an official visit to the region that:

much of the discussion ... was about the relative influence of a range of countries in the Pacific, whether it's New Zealand, Australia, China, the US, or Russia to some extent.

The role of national security as a core driver of the Reset is reinforced across a stable of government policy. For example, the protection and promotion of stability, security and resilience in the Pacific is listed as one of the government's 16 national security and intelligence priorities (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2019). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade *Strategic Intentions 2019–2023* (MFAT 2019b) states that:

New Zealand's security is directly affected by the ability of the Pacific to increase resilience, grow sustainable economies, manage conflicts and combat crimes that transgress borders.

Accordingly, the promotion of a 'stable, prosperous and resilient Pacific in which New Zealand's interests and influence are safeguarded' is one of seven strategic goals (ibid). The document outlines the desired 10-year outcome of a 'more stable, secure, resilient and well-governed Pacific' with indicators to measure success including 'evidence of partnerships between New Zealand and Pacific bilateral partners strengthened' (ibid:22).

The *Strategic Defence Policy Statement* unequivocally states that New Zealand's national security 'remains directly tied to the stability of the Pacific' (ibid:24). The statement is a significant document as it provides the most coherent statement on New Zealand's strategic environment, serving as a proxy foreign policy white paper. It sought to identify the challenges to the international rules-based order and the implications for New Zealand. Critically, it also located the Pacific within this context of heightened strategic uncertainty. The statement argues that the Pacific is confronted with intensifying challenges including climate change, transnational crime and resource competition with a 'growing gap in capacity to adequately address them' (Ministry of Defence 2018a:22).

The statement suggests that these complex disruptors could test local governance, exacerbate state fragility and likely require increased levels of assistance, including operations beyond humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (ibid). It announced a significant operational policy shift by elevating the ability of the New Zealand Defence Force to operate in the Pacific to the same level as New Zealand's territories, the Southern Ocean and Antarctica. That same year the Ministry of Defence released its climate assessment that sought to highlight the intersection between climate change and potential conflict and instability in the Pacific, stating 'the security implications of climate change are further magnified in areas dealing with weak governance or corruption' (Ministry of Defence 2018b:6).

In 2019, the Ministry of Defence released a second assessment that aimed to translate the high-level strategic policy of the Reset and the Strategic Defence Policy Statement into a regional approach. The *Advancing Pacific Partnerships* assessment is effectively how defence will align its strategic policy settings and capability plan with the Reset. This is demonstrated through the *Vaka Tahi Pacific Partnership Model* for defence engagement as a platform for building relationships across the region and grounding it in the five principles of the Reset. The New Zealand Defence Force *Strategic Plan 2019–2025* (known as Plan25) further advances the link between the Pacific and New Zealand's national security by stating:

The recognition of operating in the Pacific as equal in priority for the NZDF to New Zealand's own territory is reflective of the Government's Pacific Reset, and the importance of the Pacific to New Zealand's national security (New Zealand Defence Force 2019:8).

There are several common but noteworthy threads across the policy documents. The first is that the Reset elevated the Pacific as a national security priority in a manner that had not been previously evident. Doing so aligns with New Zealand's key ally and partner in the

Pacific – Australia who launched its own Pacific Step Up in 2017 – and offsets criticisms of New Zealand by its Five Eyes intelligence network partners who have suggested New Zealand is taking a softer line on China. The second thread is the consistent linking of New Zealand policy with Pacific identified priorities. This seeks to reinforce New Zealand's identity as part of the Pacific and garner regional buy-in for New Zealand policy. For instance the Advancing Pacific Partnerships assessment foregrounds the Boe Declaration on Regional Security (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2018) notably the emphasis on an expanded concept of security, and the Blue Pacific (Malielegaoi 2017) as guiding frameworks for defence engagement with Pacific partners. The climate assessment, for example, locates defence's response to climate security challenges within a wider policy context which includes both the Reset and the Boe Declaration. It also adopts the Boe Declaration language of an expanded concept of security. The third thread is the need for New Zealand to better understand and have improved capability and capacity to respond to the evolving strategic environment. This is reflected in stated policy deliverables such as a 'refreshed New Zealand regional security approach by 2021' (MFAT 2019b:22), which is perhaps evidenced by the defence assessments, particularly the Vaka Tahi partnership model, as well as New Zealand policing initiatives such as the three year NZ\$11m (A\$10.1m) Police Partnership program with the Fiji Police Force focused on combatting transnational crime, and support to defence policy development in Fiji and PNG.

There is no doubt that the Reset was driven in part by concerns about China's rising influence in the Pacific. Growing concerns within government were reflected in the *Strategic Defence Policy Statement*, which in stating that China 'has not consistently adopted the governance and values championed by the order's traditional leaders,' (Ministry of Defence 2018a:17) was the strongest statement New Zealand had made about China at the time. The *Climate Crisis* assessment, released later that year, made the explicit link between climate change and strategic competition in the region by suggesting that states could exploit climate assistance to increase influence and access (Ministry of Defence 2018b:7). Citing geopolitical shifts in the region, Peters, a leading proponent of a more hawkish stance on China, called on greater US engagement in the Pacific in two speeches in Washington (Peters 2018b, 2019). The view that 'we can no longer take for granted...a benign Pacific neighbourhood' is likely to become further entrenched as the shift in relative power of the US and China is more acutely felt (MFAT 2020:33). Newly appointed foreign minister Nanaia Mahuta (Powles 2020) appears to have adopted similar policy settings although these will likely be tested even more so as increasing strategic competition creates additional demands for New Zealand as its security partners harden their expectations.

## **Influence: At the nexus between identity and national security**

The Reset captures and seeks to advance New Zealand's strategic ambitions in the Pacific. For that reason, there is

heightened interest in New Zealand's ability to influence its Pacific partners and considerable strategic anxiety that New Zealand's influence has waned. Peters (2018c) acknowledged that, 'our eyes are wide open to New Zealand's decreasing influence in the Pacific'. Accordingly, the policy documents attempt to project a greater ease and confidence in framing New Zealand's engagement with the Pacific in terms of influence as well as identity. For instance, the Cabinet Paper (2018) stated that 'in no other region does New Zealand matter more, wield more influence, and have more impact than the Pacific. But our ability to pursue our interests is challenged by the dizzying array of problems the region faces and an increasingly contested strategic environment which is eroding our influence. This is seen within a broader international context where it is recognised 'it is getting harder for New Zealand's voice to be heard...and our influence will diminish over time' (MFAT 2020:22).

New Zealand's Pasifika/Pacific identity is regarded as a key soft power trait that has the potential to translate into influence (Powles 2017). This framing of New Zealand as uniquely and favourably positioned on cultural grounds to be a strategic diplomatic actor in the Pacific (Goldsmith 2017) is not new. Moreover, influence – and being seen to have influence – is a critical element of New Zealand's relationships with its key partners including ally, Australia, and strategic partner, the United States. Influence is a soft power instrument New Zealand brings to the table, with the country marketing itself to its security partners as a 'trusted bridge builder between countries in the Pacific and the wider Asia-Pacific region' (MFAT 2014). However, increasing strategic competition in the region is likely to result in competing demands on New Zealand to exercise its influence to achieve broader Five Eyes security objectives. This poses risks for New Zealand, where its national security priorities and those of security partners diverge, or even cut across, the priorities of those sharing a Pacific identity. New Zealand's challenge will therefore be how to balance the national identity project with its national security imperatives.

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# Pacific Islands in China's security and future engagement

*Denghua Zhang, The Australian National University*

China's military, known as the People's Liberation Army (PLA), has increased its engagement with Pacific island countries (PICs) in recent years. For example, in November 2019, General Li Zuocheng, Chief of PLA Joint Staff Department, visited Fiji and pledged to deepen military cooperation between the two countries and in December 2018, China donated a hydrographic and surveillance vessel to the Fijian Navy.

A closer China–PICs relationship has spurred traditional powers such as the US and Australia to strengthen ties with Pacific islands. The Trump administration was pushing Marshall Islands, Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia to renew the Compact of Free Association, a Series of treaties between these countries and the US that were partially established as compensation for the loss of life, health, and land resulting from nuclear testing conducted by the US on the Marshall Islands and Bikini and Enewetak Atolls from 1946 until 1958. The Compacts allow citizens of Micronesia to live and legally work in the US without a visa. In return, the US has sole access and a substantial amount of military and veto power over these islands. With the escalation of US–China tensions in the Indo–Pacific region, the China factor will feature more prominently.

Against the backdrop, this paper discusses two questions:

1. In what ways are PICs relevant to China's security?
2. What are the prospects of China-Pacific security engagement?

The term 'security' is used as a broad concept encompassing political, economic and military elements that are interconnected. Drawing upon public Chinese policy papers especially those of PLA, this paper provides a Chinese perspective of China-PICs security relations.

It is important to note at the outset that PLA's activities in the Pacific are just part of China's bigger engagement package which consists of foreign aid (soft loan dominated), diplomatic, trade, educational, cultural, tourism and other people-to-people engagements.

## PICs' relevance to China's security

China's security is tied to its national interests that have been clearly defined by Beijing in recent years. For the first time, in 2011, the Chinese government articulated that its core interests include:

state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification, China's political system established by the Constitution, overall social stability, and the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development (China State Council 2011).

In 2015, the PLA issued its first white paper on military strategies, stating that:

the security of overseas interests concerning energy and resources, strategic sea lines of communication (SLOCs), as well as institutions, personnel and assets abroad, has become an imminent issue (China MoD 2015).

In the same year, the Chinese National Congress passed a security law that according to Article 2, China focuses its national security on issues such as:

the regime, sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity, welfare of the people, sustainable economic and social development, and other major interests of the state (China NPC 2015).

Based on these three official definitions, PICs, though geographically distant from China, are relevant to its security interests in the following aspects. First and foremost, the Taiwan issue in the Pacific is directly related to China's sovereignty, territorial integrity and reunification. Since its founding in 1949, the communist regime in Beijing has listed the reunification of Taiwan with mainland China on the top of its agenda and spared no effort in reducing international recognition of Taiwan. This has led to the decades-long diplomatic competition between China and Taiwan in the Pacific. The urgency to solve the Taiwan issue has increased in the Xi Jinping era. In October 2013, Xi told a senior Taiwanese delegation that the issue of political division between China and Taiwan cannot be postponed forever which was interpreted as Xi's growing impatience with the standoff. The tug-of-war has intensified since Tsai Ing-wen from the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party won the presidential election in Taiwan in 2016. In response, the Chinese government has taken a tougher stand on Taiwan. Xi Jinping highlighted in January 2019 that China would not abandon the option of using force if necessary to solve the Taiwan issue. With China's strong lobby efforts, Solomon Islands and Kiribati switched their recognition from Taiwan to China in September 2019, tipping the imbalance of power in China's favour. This setback makes Taiwan's remaining four allies in the Pacific (Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau and Tuvalu) more important to Taiwan and China's future relationship.

In addition, China needs PICs' voting support at international and regional institutions on other issues related to its sovereignty and territorial integrity such as in Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and the South and East China Seas. For example, Papua New Guinea (PNG) supported China over the controversial Hong Kong Security Law at the UN in July 2020. PNG and Vanuatu expressed support for China's position on the South China Sea issue in 2016. China's economic stake in the Pacific is also increasing with a focus on mineral resources and fisheries. Since late 2014, PNG has exported two million tons of liquified

natural gas to China annually, which accounted for three per cent of China's total imports of 61.79 million tons in 2018. The Chinese state-owned enterprise CNFC Overseas Fisheries established its branch in Suva, Fiji in 1998. The tuna catches of the company's 42 longliners has now reached 14,000 tons annually. Deep seabed mining in the Pacific is another area that has received growing attention from China. Although it is still an uncharted territory, the massive reserves of seabed mineral resources in the vast Pacific Ocean hold great potential in the future. The China Ocean Mineral Resources Research and Development Association, which is affiliated with the Ministry of Natural Resources, has increased its research on the Pacific and its engagement with Pacific governments.

PICs also matter to China's space programs and military strategies. Chinese spacecraft tracking ships *Yuan Wang*, managed by the China Satellite Maritime Tracking and Control Department of PLA, have been conducting monitoring missions in the Pacific Ocean for China's space programs including its first manned space flight, Chang'e lunar probe and the Beidou navigation satellite system (equivalent to the US global positioning system). Furthermore, PICs, along with some islands of Japan, form the second island chain, which is a part of the vague 'three island chains' theory coined by late US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, in 1951 to strategically surround China. To break these island chains has long been a goal of PLA senior leadership over time. The strategies of PLA Navy have evolved from 'coastal defence' to 'offshore waters defence', and more recently to 'the combination of offshore waters defence and open seas protections'. PLA doctrines have also changed with a focus on maritime military capability. As the PLA 2015 white paper mentions explicitly:

The traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned, and great importance has to be attached to managing the seas and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests. It is necessary for China to develop a modern maritime military force structure commensurate with its national security and development interests, safeguard its national sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, protect the security of strategic SLOCs and overseas interests, and participate in international maritime cooperation, so as to provide strategic support for building itself into a maritime power (China MoD 2015).

In line with this strategy, PLA has conducted reforms in recent years to streamline its line structure and devote more resources to the development of its Navy. All these shifts have contributed to the growing capability and confidence of the PLA Navy. This makes PICs more relevant to China's interest and security.

As a result, PLA has increased its engagement with its counterparts in PNG, Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu in recent years, in the form of personnel training, material assistance (such as military uniforms and vehicles), grants for facility construction and exchanges of mid and junior level officers (Zhang 2020:1). Table 1 lists PLA visits to the four PICs in the past two decades. As of August 2020, PLA has organised four forums for senior defence officials from the Caribbean and South Pacific islands. Chinese maritime

research vessels such as *Haiyang 6* and *Xuelong 2* have also conducted scientific hydrographical activities in the Pacific, triggering concerns that the research results can be used for both civilian and military purposes.

Table 1. PLA visits to the Pacific since 2000

Fiji	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mar 2002, General Qian Shugen, Deputy Chief of PLA General Staff Department</li> <li>2. Jan 2013, Major General Qian Lihua, Chief of Foreign Affairs Office, Ministry of Defense</li> <li>3. Aug 2014, naval hospital ship Peace Ark</li> <li>4. Dec 2016, naval training ship Zhenghe</li> <li>5. Aug 2018, Peace Ark</li> <li>6. Nov 2019, naval training ship Qi Jiguang</li> <li>7. Nov 2019, General Li Zuocheng, Chief of Joint Staff Department, Central Military Commission</li> </ol>
PNG	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Oct 2009, General Chen Bingde, Chief of PLA General Staff Department</li> <li>2. Aug 2010, Zhenghe and frigate Mian Yang</li> <li>3. Sept 2014, Peace Ark</li> <li>4. Jul 2018, Peace Ark</li> <li>5. Oct 2019, Qi Jiguang</li> </ol>
Tonga	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Aug 2012, Zhenghe</li> <li>2. Aug 2013, General Wu Changde, Deputy Director of PLA Political Work Department</li> <li>3. Aug 2014, Peace Ark</li> <li>4. May 2015, Lieutenant General Xing Shucheng, Deputy Commander of Guangzhou Military Region</li> <li>5. Jul 2015, Major General Ci Guowei, Deputy Chief of Foreign Affairs Office, Ministry of Defense</li> <li>6. Apr 2016, Vice Admiral Tian Zhong, Deputy Commander of PLA Navy</li> <li>7. Aug 2018, Peace Ark</li> </ol>
Vanuatu	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sept 2010, Zhenghe and Mian Yang</li> <li>2. Jan 2014, General Wang Guanzhong, Deputy Chief of PLA General Staff Department</li> <li>3. Sept 2014, Peace Ark</li> <li>4. Jun 2017, PLA naval escort taskforce</li> <li>5. Jul 2018, Peace Ark</li> </ol>

Source: compiled by author based on public data

## Prospects of China–Pacific security engagement

So far, the China–PICs security cooperation is limited in scope and depth compared with that between China and other regions, and between the US, Australia and Pacific islands. For example, PLA has established 130 military attaché offices overseas with none in the Pacific. However, it is expected that PLA will place more attention on the Pacific region in the future for two reasons. First, the military modernisation and building of more aircraft carriers have boosted PLA's confidence to extend its influence beyond the first island chain. The Chinese government led by Xi Jinping has ambitions to rejuvenate China as a great power under the 'China Dream' banner. Xi has shifted his focus from the '*taoguang yanghui*' strategy (buy one's time

and hide one's strength) held by his three predecessors, to 'you suo zuowei' (make great achievements). PLA has conducted extensive reforms especially the sweeping organisational reform in 2015–16 to increase the coordination of different units in modern warfare. The modernisation of PLA Navy has also accelerated under Xi Jinping. China's first homemade aircraft carrier *Shandong* was commissioned in April 2017. Another two are reported to be under construction. China's defence budget has maintained a steady growth, exceeding US\$178.6 billion for 2020 with a growth of 6.6 per cent from last year. With its growing capability, PLA navy fleets have frequently sailed through the Taiwan Strait and Miyako Strait which sit along the first island chain. Thus, in January 2017, China's official newspaper *People's Daily* confidently predicted, 'It is just a matter of time before China's aircraft carrier crossed the second island chain and reaches the Eastern Pacific' (Zhang 2017: 40). In this circumstance, small wonder that PLA will make greater efforts to strengthen its military ties with PICs in the future.

Second, the rapid escalation of the US–China rivalry is likely to stimulate PLA to develop more substantial security cooperation with Pacific islands. As some analysts argue, the US–China competition is a systematic one in nature between the existing hegemony and a rising superpower for leadership and status at global and regional arenas (Heather and Thompson 2018:115). PLA has expressed concerns over former President Obama's policy of pivoting to the Asia–Pacific, criticising it for aggravating regional tensions (China MoD 2015). In recent years, the US–China relations have soured on all fronts with the military sector included. The Trump administration has targeted the communist government in China as a revisionist power and the primary competitor of the US, and took counter measures. For example, the US government put forward the 'Free and Open Indo–Pacific' Strategy in 2017. In July 2020, the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo criticised the previous administrations for their 'blind engagement' with China and pledged to contain China's expansionism (Pompeo 2020). In the face of mounting pressure from the US, Beijing has adopted dual strategies. Chinese top diplomats such as Yang Jiechi (Chinese communist party politburo member and former foreign minister), Wang Yi (incumbent foreign minister) and Cui Tiankai (ambassador to the US) have recently called for dialogues between the countries to solve the crisis. This goodwill gesture can be interpreted in part as Beijing's effort to occupy the moral high ground if the bilateral relationship goes from bad to worse.

On the other hand, the Xi Jinping administration has shown no signs of compromise on issues of its core interests. As a warning against a closer US–Taiwan relationship and the military drills of US aircraft carrier strike groups in the disputed South China Sea, PLA conducted counter-drills almost simultaneously in the Yellow Sea, Bohai Sea and the South and East China Seas in August 2020. PLA has also blamed the US for 'strengthening its Asia–Pacific military alliances and reinforcing military deployment and intervention, adding complexity to regional security' (China MoD 2019).

If the current US–China tensions get out of control and spiral into a cold war or even military confrontations (with the Taiwan issue and the South and East China Seas disputes as potential flashpoints), it could increase China's urgency to build closer military ties with PICs. Then it may be possible that China will seek to establish military bases in the Pacific to directly compete for influence with the US. Discussions have already started in the academic circle in China. Some Chinese scholars call for Beijing to consider building ports for civilian and military uses in PICs such as Fiji, PNG and Vanuatu (Zhang 2020:2). Should PLA proceed, the challenges are apparent. These plans will meet with firm opposition from traditional powers such as the US, Australia, France and New Zealand. Compared with China, these countries enjoy closer historical and security ties with PICs and can exert influence on the latter's security policymaking. To guard against China's rise in the Pacific, traditional powers have stepped up their engagement with PICs and strengthened internal coordination typified by the Australia–India–Japan–US quadrilateral security dialogue and the outbidding of China by Australia and the US to jointly fund the upgrade of the Lombrum military base on PNG's Manus island.

The close relations and shared cultures between PICs and traditional powers on one hand, and the growing PICs–China engagement since 2006 on the other, will make it extremely difficult for PICs to take sides in the US–China rivalry. Equally difficult, if not impossible, is that PICs will give the green light for China to establish military bases in their countries. Even if China succeeds in persuading a Pacific island country to accept China's proposal, it is likely that the Chinese base will be presented as a logistical support facility similar to its military base in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa. Completed in August 2017, this is China's first overseas military base and has been described by PLA as mainly providing logistical support to its escort missions in the Gulf of Aden (Cabestan 2019:736).

If the US–China tensions ease under a Biden administration, the development of US–China relations globally and regionally is a new question that deserves attention. As the existing superpower, the US will continue to strengthen its security relations with PICs to advance its interests. From China's perspective, as a rising superpower, if its economic and military power continue to rise, its security interest will undoubtedly expand. This could lead to a conflict of interest. In this case, can the US and China accommodate each other's security interest in the Pacific? Can they manage differences and share power to live in peace? These are subject to debate. Different models such as 'grand bargain' and 'a concert of powers' have been proposed by scholars (Glaser 2015; White 2012). These do not seem feasible in the current climate of growing rivalry between the US and China. For example, since 2018, PLA has been excluded by the US from the annual Rim of the Pacific exercise.

In addition to avoiding taking sides in the US–China rivalry, PICs will benefit if the two great powers can cooperate and shoulder responsibilities on the issue of climate change. Climate change is the largest single security threat



to PICs who are constrained by resources and expertise to tackle the issue. Currently the US and China have provided their own climate aid to PICs, but much more needs to be done at the global level led by the two countries and other major emitters of greenhouse gas.

Another scenario that deserves attention is whether PLA will be involved in future operations to evacuate Chinese diaspora stranded by social unrests in the Pacific. Guided by the 'Go Out' Strategy initiated by the Chinese government, millions of Chinese business people, either as staff of state-owned enterprises or private businesses, have gone overseas to seek commercial opportunities in the past two decades. This creates a new task for PLA. As the 2019 PLA white paper articulates:

overseas interests are a crucial part of China's national interests. One of the missions of China's armed forces is to effectively protect the security and legitimate rights and interests of overseas Chinese people, organisations and institutions (China MoD 2019).

In practice, PLA has sent its air force and navy vessels to evacuate Chinese citizens from war-ravaged Libya (2011) and Yemen (2015).

However, except for these two operations, the Chinese government has used non-PLA resources such as commercial charter flights to evacuate its citizens during the riots/conflicts in Timor-Leste (2006), Lebanon (2006), Chad (2008), Haiti (2009), Kyrgyzstan (2010) and Egypt (2011). Similar operations were conducted in the Pacific. The growing number of Chinese businesses and their dominance of the retail sector in the Pacific have given rise to local resentment. This sentiment contributed largely to the riots in Honiara and Nuku'alofa in April and November 2006 respectively with the Chinese businesses being the main target. Coordinated by the Chinese embassies in PNG (responsible for providing consular services to Chinese in Solomon Islands as the latter was Taiwan's ally at the time) and Tonga, the Chinese government came to the rescue of its citizens affected in the riots by organising charter flights to pick them up.

As the Xi Jinping administration is proactively rolling out its Belt and Road Initiative in the Pacific, China's economic interest and the number of business people will continue to grow. The Chinese diaspora could be trapped in similar social unrests in some PICs in the future. When this happens, the Chinese government may take different approaches in response. If the US-China relations have not broken down to open conflicts, it is likely that China will not involve PLA in the evacuation operations to avoid fuelling the security concerns of the US and other traditional powers. However, if the US and China slip into conflicts, there is more chance that PLA will be directly involved in the protection of Chinese business and citizens in PICs. This will exacerbate the traditional powers' existing mistrust of China.

## Conclusion

To sum up, PICs are relevant to China's core interests and security strategies. China's military engagement with PICs has grown in the past two decades. With its confidence in breaking the first island chain, PLA will likely set its eyes on the Pacific. The escalation of China-US rivalry could be a catalyst for China to further increase its military engagement with PICs. More competition between China, the US and other traditional powers in the security sector is expected. This will put PICs in a difficult position. At the extreme, PICs will need to take sides.

PLA's military ambition in the Pacific will also be affected by China's available resources. China's economic wealth accumulated in the past four decades has enabled the steady growth of PLA budgets in the past two decades. However, trade wars with the US, COVID-19 and massive flooding present grave challenges for China's economy. How this will affect China's military spending in the future remains to be seen. A reduced budget will inevitably constrain PLA's activities in the Pacific.

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## COVID-19 and climate: Threat multipliers to Pacific food and nutrition security

*Steven Crimp, Robyn Alders, Mark Howden, Rachel Friedman, The Australian National University and Federico Davilo, University of Technology Sydney*

Pacific Island Countries (PICs) comprise more than 2000 islands and atolls in 28 countries and territories. While the region covers one third of the Earth's surface, the total land area is only approximately 550,000km<sup>2</sup>, representing 2 per cent of the entire 30,000,000km<sup>2</sup> of the Pacific region (Barnett 2011). This land area is home to approximately 2.3 million people (excluding Papua New Guinea) of whom half live within 10km of the coast (Andrew et al. 2019). Population numbers are rapidly growing around major cities, and urbanisation in PICs is happening three times faster than the global average (UN Habitat 2015). By 2050, over half of the Pacific population is expected to live in urban areas (UNESCAP 2018).

Subsistence food production forms a significant part of household income, well over 60 per cent in some countries, but also varies greatly across the region. Variable inflation rates, poor economic growth, negative trade balances, global food price rises, and increasing household dependence on commercial markets affect almost all PICs and have added to food and nutrition insecurity (SPC 2016). Agricultural production in large parts of the Pacific is well below its inherent potential, with recent analysis by Farrell et al. (2020) finding that between 1980 and 2016 crop production in the region (excluding Fiji and PNG) declined from 1200 to 800 grams/per capita/per day.

Pacific food systems are diverse and complex, spanning different geographies and agro-ecological environments. To understand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Pacific food security, we selected seven PICs on the basis of a typology of island groupings (Table 1). This allowed the impacts of COVID-19 to be differentiated geographically and is consistent with other Pacific studies that have examined food systems shocks, and with regional development in food systems programming (Charlton et al. 2016, SPC 2020). The seven PICs selected include small islands (Kiribati and Tuvalu), medium islands (Samoa, Tonga) and larger islands (Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji). We conducted a separate parallel study in PNG, which is excluded from this list of countries, because of its size and geographical complexity (but covered in the following paper).

Table 1. Typology of Pacific islands

Grouping	Typical geologies	Nations in this assessment	Population (est. ,000)	Total island area (km2)
Group 1: Smaller islands	Small reef and composite islands	Kiribati	120	995
		Tuvalu	10	44
Group 2: Medium islands	Volcanic, limestone, and composite islands	Samoa	199	3,046
		Tonga	100	847
Group 3: Larger islands	A mix of composite, limestone and sand-based islands	Solomon Islands	667	29,675
		Vanuatu	305	13,526
		Fiji	895	20,857
Total			2,296	68,990

While the contributions that agriculture and fisheries make to livelihoods and the socio-economic profile vary between countries, primary food production remains core to the region's economies:

- The smaller Group 1 countries are more reliant on fisheries than agriculture. Both Tuvalu and Kiribati have approximately 40 per cent of the population living in rural areas. Agricultural land makes up 42 per cent of Kiribati and 60 per cent of Tuvalu, contributing approximately 24 per cent of GDP in Kiribati and 17 per cent in Tuvalu. Agriculture and fisheries contribute between 9.2 and 35 per cent of GDP depending on country.
- The Group 2 countries have lower capacity for food production, and much higher trade deficits given their reliance on imported food. In Tonga, over 77 per cent of the population lives in rural areas, and agriculture takes up 46 per cent of the land area and contributes 15–20 per cent of GDP. In Samoa, 82 per cent of the population live in rural and peri-urban areas, agriculture takes up 12 per cent of the land area and contributes 10–20 per cent of GDP (Sialoa 2019).
- Group 3 countries have highly diverse food production systems and differentiated dependence on rural livelihoods. In Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, 70–80 per cent of the population living in rural areas are involved in agriculture and/or fishing. In Fiji less than half of the population lives in rural areas. The contribution of agriculture to GDP also varies in Group 3 countries, from approximately 35–40 per cent in Solomon Islands to 15–20 per cent in Vanuatu and less than 10 per cent in Fiji (FAO 2020a).

Data collected include a range of media and public policy responses from different PICs, as well as selected examples from interviews carried out with 21 key informants working in agriculture, fisheries and policy in the Pacific. Data were collected in June–July 2020 and analysed in August 2020. It builds from parallel emerging studies that either document the immediate impacts of COVID-19 on food systems (Eriksson et al. 2020, Piturara 2020), or projects the potential impacts.

## **Factors currently undermining Pacific food and nutrition security**

### ***Climate and water risk, associated loss of arable land and the adaptation gap***

Climate change and associated increases in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events have negatively impacted food and nutrition security in the Pacific region for over a decade (MacPherson 2017). In 2015, Cyclone Winston resulted in A\$368 million in lost agricultural production (Sleet 2019). In the same year, Tropical Cyclone Pam resulted in the loss of 80 per cent of crop production in Vanuatu (Cvitanovic et al. 2016). In addition to the obvious impacts of extreme weather events on food production and food trading, climate change is also driving geographical spread of disease and pests, increasing food safety risks (Maggiore et al. 2020).

Compounding impacts of climate threats, COVID-19 control measures, and food insecurity were experienced in April 2020, during Tropical Cyclone Harold in Vanuatu. Measures to mitigate COVID-19 contagion in Vanuatu led to nation-wide lockdowns, limiting the normal movement of people. Category 5 Cyclone Harold severely impacted the northern provinces: 95 per cent of homes were destroyed in Pentecost, crop damage ranged from 50 per cent to 100 per cent, and an estimated 27 per cent of the population was displaced (Refugees International 2020). FAO's situational assessment in May 2020 estimated that 17,500 ha of cropland was affected (FAO 2020b). Relief measures from Australia and New Zealand were hampered when humanitarian aid workers were required to quarantine for 14 days before being able to aid local communities.

Freshwater availability and extreme climate events have and will continue to put pressure on agricultural production. The combination of sea level rise and thinning freshwater lenses due to lower rainfall and increased extraction drives salt water intrusion, which will amplify food systems insecurity (Leal Filho et al. 2020). This in turn depresses agricultural production and presents a geopolitical security risk in the region.

### ***Persistent malnutrition***

While persistent malnutrition in the region has generally declined, it still remains higher than the global average. Kiribati, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu have over 35 per cent of their respective populations suffering from nutritional deficiency (IHME 2018). Malnutrition impacts are unevenly felt, with vulnerable households (including the elderly, people living with a disability, the socio-economically poor and other marginalised groups), with children and women being overrepresented (FAO 2020a). The top two risk factors causing the greatest burden of disease in the Pacific are malnutrition, including nutritional deficiencies and dietary risks including diabetes, kidney disease, and cardiovascular diseases. For instance, diabetes and kidney disease in the seven Pacific Island countries in this assessment have a much higher prevalence than the global average (IHME 2018).

One of the drivers of persistent malnutrition has been the changing international trade context of the region. Pacific trade liberalisation in the mid-1990s resulted in an increase in cheap imported processed foods such as noodles, rice, and wheat. The convenience, low price and ease of access of these products led to changed food consumption habits. Further trade and economic impacts of COVID-19, discussed later in this paper, may hamper a dietary transition, with people not being able to afford healthier foods or adequately feed children, thus lowering the consumption of nutrient rich foods.

### ***Limited employment opportunities and reliance on remittances***

Key informant responses indicate that the high proportion of low-paid, informal labour in agriculture, and other services using migrant labour, remains a significant vulnerability in the Pacific region. Poorly remunerated

agricultural workers contribute to decreased food access, utilisation, and stability over time. The International Labour Organization stressed that ‘despite sustained job growth, decent work deficits and informality challenge prospects of further reduction in working poverty in Asia and the Pacific’ (ILO 2018).

Tourism and associated services are major employers in the Pacific, notably in Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa. Tourism makes a substantial contribution to the GDP of several of the Pacific countries (e.g., 30 per cent in Samoa, 38.9 per cent in Fiji, and 45 per cent in Vanuatu). Tourist related services provide between 30 per cent (Solomon Islands) and 80.2 per cent (Samoa) of total employment in the Pacific. Tourism also creates much of the domestic demand for fresh produce and thus farm incomes for those delivering to restaurants and resorts. For example, in 2017, hotels and resorts in Fiji’s main tourism areas spent FJ\$74.4 million (A\$50 million) on procurement of fresh produce.

Remittances make significant contributions to social protection in the Pacific, although their aggregate flow varies widely across the region. In a recent analysis, the contributions of remittances to GDP in 2018 ranged from 40.7 per cent in Tonga to about 16.4 per cent in Samoa. The World Bank estimates that remittance flows across the Pacific will drop, compared to 2019 estimates, by approximately 20 per cent or US\$100 billion dollars, by the end of 2020 due to restricted international employment opportunities (IMF 2020). It predicts that due to reductions in national GDP and remittances up to 60 million people will be pushed into extreme poverty as a result of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This substantial poverty increase can lead to substantial reduction in economic access to food, creating both an immediate and an ongoing food security risk for the region.

### *Significant dependence on food imports*

Since the 1980s, there has been a marked acceleration of the globalisation of Pacific food systems. Food imports increased in parallel to a decline of total agricultural output. The dependence on international systems exposes communities to the price fluctuations of commodities in global markets. At this stage, international food prices have remained relatively stable during COVID-19; however, the dependence of the region makes it particularly sensitive to global price fluctuations if they occur during the northern hemisphere’s winter. Despite relative price stability, import prices remain elevated compared to 2019 (AMIS 2020), and more volatile than in previous decades. Both market price and price volatility are important determinants of access to food and thus important determinants of Pacific food security.

### *Persistent gender inequality*

In 2018, it was reported that while Asia and the Pacific had made progress in some areas of gender equality, available data against the Sustainable Development Goals indicators highlighted significant inequality for women and girls (ADB and UN Women 2018). For one, gender-based violence is endemic in the Pacific region; often during conflicts and natural disasters, social structures are further destabilised,

leaving many women and girls vulnerable to increased sexual violence, exploitative labour, and trafficking (UNFPA 2020).

Women make important contributions to agriculture and rural livelihoods, and play a vital role in the care and reproduction of households and communities. However, persistent gender inequalities in the region, such as unequal access to productive resources (including land, services and inputs, finance, training and information), markets, and institutions, hamper the realisation of women’s human and productive potential and undermine community food security. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated already limited access to resources. The closure of fresh food markets has had a disproportionate impact on women, as the main participants in fresh market sales. These closures served to reduce household incomes and in turn hamper ongoing food production.

### *Rapid population growth, intergenerational inequity, and urbanisation*

The demographic youth bulge, accompanied by inter-generational inequity that works against the young, and growing urbanisation are impacting agricultural and fisheries workforces and hence food security across the Pacific. Most public infrastructure and support are targeted at urban communities, exacerbating the urban-rural divide in much of the Pacific. Under-resourcing of rural development has left youth and rural communities more vulnerable to shocks and hence less resilient for food security.

Poverty is known to exacerbate food insecurity; in urban areas with limited capacity to grow food, loss of employment can rapidly amplify food insecurity. Urban and informal workers in the economy are core to keeping food systems functioning, especially in larger island countries like Fiji, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. In both Port Vila and Honiara, farmers often commute from rural areas to central markets, often staying overnight until produce is sold. COVID-19 related lockdowns have meant many urban markets have closed, or operate at reduced volumes, cutting income for street food vendors and limiting the influx of food from rural areas. Because many urban dwellers rely on income from informal food-related businesses, the pandemic has resulted in negative economic impacts for much of the urban population, reduced purchasing capacity for food, and therefore elevated food stress. This is compounded by less fresh produce entering urban areas, increasing food prices for staples.

Youth are also disproportionately exposed and vulnerable to socio-economic shocks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The Pacific has a very young population – more than half of the population of the 22 countries and territories in the Pacific is under the age of 25. Un- and under-employment is a major concern, with average youth unemployment at 23 per cent compared with the global average of 12.6 per cent (ILO 2018). Youth living in informal urban settlements have been hardest hit by the economic downturn and are less likely to find gainful employment, than those over the age of 25 once economic recovery is underway.

### *Persistent under-resourcing of biosecurity, animal and plant health*

Pathogens and pests continue to threaten agricultural and aquatic production in the Pacific – the risk of pests and diseases increases as genetic diversity declines. Island environments have inherently limited biological resilience in the face of aggressive invasive species, due to limited natural predators, and relatively low genetic diversity. Multiple biosecurity breaches have resulted in substantial food insecurity and nutritional impacts, loss of farmer incomes, export earnings, and balance of payments (McGregor et al. 2011).

### *Fragmented value chains and food governance systems*

In many countries across the Pacific, the governance of food security and food systems extends across multiple agencies managing agriculture and trade through to public health, including public, private and civil society actors. This fragmentation makes policies that work across sectors hard to facilitate. COVID-19 has placed extra stress on these governance arrangements and resulted in instances where the rollout of incentives has been slow, and ineffective. Contrastingly, knowledge and information sharing between agencies and between communities in the region has been collaborative during the COVID-19 pandemic. The diversity of studies looking at food and nutrition security have enabled the World Food Programme Regional Food Security Cluster to meet and share progress on work, allowing for strong alignment of interventions to support recovery.

### *Traditional farming practises and declines in agricultural productivity.*

The Pacific region has the smallest land holdings in the world, with an average holding of 1 hectare, and an average of 3.2 parcels per holding (FAO-RAP 2020). For most of the Pacific, the total land cultivated by smallholders comprises a sizeable portion of the total agricultural land. Agricultural production in large parts of the Pacific is well below its potential with recent analysis by Farrell et al. (2020) finding that between 1980-2016 crop production in the region (excluding Fiji and PNG) declined from 1,200 to 800 grams/per capita/per day (includes foods relevant to food security, excluding cash crops and tuna).

Growing input costs, more variable seasonal conditions, incentives to grow specific cash or food crops, and the pressure to reduce the complexity of crop rotations have all resulted in much lower crop diversity than ever before, in turn predisposing the region to system wide shocks, notably for very subsistence-dependent countries like Solomon Islands. Cash crop production has continued in Fiji, and increased in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Copra, sugar cane and kava have seen increased focus as an engine of economic development in rural areas, across Group 2 and 3 islands.

Marine production plays a critical role in some Pacific economies. National fisheries in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Kiribati are highly lucrative foreign-owned enterprises (Barclay and Cartwright 2007). For example, in Kiribati

which has one of the largest commercial tuna fisheries in the region (Gillett and Tuati 2018), up to 75 per cent of government revenue comes from oceanic fisheries access fees. Conversely, of the fish consumed in rural areas in the Pacific, 60–90 per cent comes from subsistence fishing activities (Bell et al. 2009). The contribution of coastal fisheries to communities is often understated, and the pressures on marine ecosystems creates economic and food security risks for these dependent communities.

While important for both local and commercial economic benefits, these marine systems are exposed to global economic and climate change pressures. Warming oceans will create further risk to the food security of communities reliant on fishing, for protein and micronutrients. COVID-19 further exacerbates these threats through movement restrictions that have resulted in declines in subsistence fishing activities and income from temporary closure of commercial enterprises.

### *Increasing logistical costs and the future implications of greenhouse gas targets for shipping food to and from Pacific nations*

In 2018, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) adopted mandatory measures under the pollution prevention treaty (MARPOL) to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases from international shipping. The IMO has executed global technical cooperation projects to support the capacity of states, particularly developing states, to implement and support energy efficiency in the shipping sector (IMO 2018). Despite these support plans, the emissions reduction strategy is impacting the Pacific in a number of ways. The first is a slowdown in the speed of existing vessels in order to reduce fuel usage. This is slowing the delivery of food products to Pacific islands and potentially disrupting existing transport schedules. A second, longer-term impact, will be an increase in logistics costs as fleets are required to replace older vessels with more energy efficient ships.

Both added logistics costs and more volatile scheduling will have significant impacts on food availability and food prices across the Pacific. We currently see the potential impacts of added logistics costs and more volatile scheduling resulting from COVID-19 disruptions with localised food stress in Group 1 islands, as well as more volatile food prices in Group 2 and 3 islands (Table 1).

### *Poorly adapted and underfunded education and risk communication*

Across the Pacific region, child and adult education is insufficiently adapted to local conditions, which contributes to a lack of practical understanding of sustainable agriculture, human nutrition, and sustainable food systems. Some recent examples focusing on education for environmental sustainability and green growth provide guidance on how education needs to transform in order to encourage climate change adapted agricultural practices (UNESCO 2016).

School curricula are often poorly adapted to local settings, including local agroecological zones and marketing systems (Epstein and Yuthas 2012) and inadequate

resources devoted to teaching human nutrition and how to meet nutrient requirements with locally available, nutritious food. The limited investment in education further perpetuates gender inequalities. These matters are vital to ensuring good outcomes for human wellbeing, food and nutrition security, and natural resource utilisation.

Gaps in risk communication tools and practices across the region weaken the capacity of countries to effectively engage with populations at risk and the wider public in the event of health security or food security threats, particularly in the Pacific (CHS 2019). Limited formal education in relation to the origin and control of infectious disease complicates effective risk communication.

## Conclusions

We have examined key threat multipliers and how they are contributing to factors that exacerbate food insecurity in the Pacific. The current COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted exposures in Pacific security, with this shock resulting in significant loss of employment and incomes, disrupted value chains due to both local and international restrictions on logistics, and resultant increases in food prices and growing food insecurity. In some Group 1 countries, food producers are concerned about the limited availability and/or access to agricultural supplies for the next growing seasons. These input constraints are likely to result in further reductions in food production, extending food insecurity in the region.

Declining food access in urban areas and worsening gender-based discrimination were identified as concerning impacts, but not necessarily across the entire Pacific region. Despite no recorded cases in some countries, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on economies, jobs, food production, education, and health systems have been widespread, with loss of livelihoods and increased levels of poverty. This is occurring against the backdrop of declining agricultural productivity over much of the Pacific region and in concert with a range of pre-existing regional and country-specific threat multipliers, highlighting the fragile state of food security in the Pacific. This convergence of threats highlights the importance of taking a comprehensive, all-hazards, multi-sectoral approach to achieving resilient food systems in the Pacific.

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# Food security in the Southwest Pacific

*R Michael Bourke, The Australian National University*

## Improvements in food security

Over the last 80–140 years food security has increased across the Southwest Pacific countries, in particular in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands where between 76 and 87 per cent of the populations live in rural areas. Food security, as defined by the United Nations' Committee on World Food Security, means that all people at all times have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their food preferences and dietary needs for an active and healthy life (IFPRI 2020).

Food security has increased in the Southwest Pacific nations because of:

- the adoption of more hardy and productive food crops including sweet potatoes, cassava, tannia (*Xanthasoma taro*), maize, African yam, peanuts, numerous vegetables including pumpkin, choko, amaranths and hardier cultivars of existing crops, particularly ABB triploid banana;
- the use of cash to purchase food when subsistence food is insufficient; and
- links between urban and rural relatives.

## Adoption of new food crops

The adoption of new food crops has varied between locations and over time. For example, the anthropologist Malinowski (1935:180) noted that sweet potato was adopted on Kiriwina Island in the Trobriands around 1890 and was a moderately important crop by 1915 by which time its incorporation into gardens had helped reduce the impact of food shortages. When taro blight, a deadly disease caused by the fungus *Phytophthora colocasiae*, resulted in the destruction of taro crops in Solomon Islands, Bougainville and Buka in the 1940s (Packard 1975), sweet potato rapidly replaced it as the staple food (Connell 1978). By the early to mid-2000s, sweet potato provided about 65 per cent of food energy in Kiriwina, PNG and Solomon Islands (Bourke et al. 2006:23). Production and consumption of sweet potato continues to expand in PNG and Vanuatu, as it does elsewhere in the Pacific islands (Iese et al. 2018).

In recent decades, villagers in many locations in the SW Pacific have grown more cassava, although it has become the most important food in only a few locations. Over the past 30 years, African yam has been incorporated into food production systems in the region, along with triploid bananas, particularly hardy ABB types, that are high yielding and resistant to drought.

These newly adopted food crops have increased food security in a number of ways. They generally produce more food per unit of land area than the older Asia-Pacific food crops such as taro, yam and diploid bananas. Importantly, they continue to produce reasonably well when land use is intensified and soil fertility declines. Newly adopted food crops can increase total food production because the cropping period can be extended and fallow periods can be

reduced allowing more numerous plantings over a 15–20 year period. Improvements in food security associated with changes in staple food crops have mostly occurred in the PNG lowlands, intermediate altitude zones, as well as in the islands of PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. There have been some gains in productivity with adoption of different foods crops in the PNG highlands, particularly cassava and triploid bananas in the lower valleys, and 'English' potato at higher altitudes (2000–2800m). However, there have been fewer gains from adoption of new species in the PNG highlands than in the lowlands and islands in the region. Table 1 gives an overview of the main food sources in PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Table 1. National population and food sources in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu

Parameter	PNG	Solomon Islands	Vanuatu
Estimated mid-2020 national population (1)	8,935,000	712,000	295,000
Rural dwellers as proportion of total population (per cent) (2)	87	80	76
Proportion of food produced locally (per cent) (3)	83	79	78
Main sources of carbohydrate food from locally produced sources (4)	Sweet potato, banana, coconut, yam, cassava, sago, taro, tannia	Sweet potato, coconut, cassava, banana, tannia, taro, yam	Taro, coconut, banana, yam, cassava, tannia, sweet potato

## Notes

1. (Pacific Community 2020). The population of PNG is not known precisely as there has not been a reliable national census since 2000. Bourke and Allen (forthcoming) estimate the mid-2020 population was between 8.5 and 9.6 million.
2. (Pacific Community 2020). This is the proportion of the total population who live in rural areas, that is, those who are not living in urban areas. Most rural dwellers are rural villagers, but some live in non-village situations, such as schools, small government stations, mission stations, plantations or mining camps.
3. (Bourke et al. 2009:131; Bourke et al. 2006:24; Bourke 1999) for PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu respectively.
4. (Bourke et al. 2009:138-144; Bourke et al. 2006:22-23; Bourke 1999) for PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu respectively.

## Use of cash to purchase food

The second important reason that food security has improved for rural villagers is improved access to cash to buy imported

or locally grown food when subsistence crops are inadequate. Sales of imported rice increase sharply after major natural disasters such as cyclones, drought and frost. Much of the imported rice, wheat-based foods, vegetable oil, canned fish and meat is consumed by those living in urban and rural non-village areas. Some peri-urban families obtain much of their food energy from imported foods while villagers with limited links to markets rarely consume imported foods. Generally, rural villagers in the SW Pacific obtain up to 20 per cent of their food energy from imported foods.

Malo Island in Vanuatu provides a fairly typical regional example of island-based villagers in the region. Allen (2015) documented that on average a resident of Malo derives around 20 per cent of their calories from food imports and that, in most years, this could be easily substituted with surplus subsistence production.

### Rural-urban links

The third factor which has improved food security for rural villagers is links with urban relatives although this has less impact compared to access to cash and adoption of new food crops. Nevertheless, when subsistence food production is inadequate, some urban dwellers transfer money to their rural-based relatives to enable them to purchase food. This is more common during cyclones, severe drought and frost when gardens are destroyed.

Efficient supply chains for imported rice and wheat-based foods would facilitate the availability of foods that can be readily stored and transported long distances. The same supply chains, however, also facilitate the widespread availability of items with low food value and those associated with poor health outcomes, particularly carbonated drinks and food with a high sugar content.

### Changes in nutritional status

In the 1960s and 1970s, dietary surveys of many groups in PNG whose nutrition had changed little from precolonial times found that diets in some areas were ‘grossly inadequate’ (Korte, 1976). In a review of human nutrition in PNG, Heywood and Nakikus (1982) reported that many low-protein diets and a limited amount of available food often resulted in slow physical growth of children, (Mueller, Vounatsou et al. 2001) and stunting, high infant death rates, girls not maturing until their late teens (Mueller and Smith 1999), and stunting in adults. When people adopted cash crops and started buying imported food, including protein-enriched rice, tinned fish and meat, diets improved significantly and people were able to get through periods of overall food shortage.

Since about 1990, however, the rate of nutritional improvement has slowed and in some communities may have ceased. The limited number of trustworthy surveys with large samples means little recent reliable information is now available.<sup>1</sup> Today, undernutrition in children under the age of five remains a significant problem in PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, as well as some other Pacific Islands nations (SPC 2011). In PNG, almost half of children under five years old and one-third of children in Solomon

Islands and Vanuatu, are stunted – the result of inadequate food intake over a long period. In PNG, there is a reasonably high level of wasting, which indicates short-term malnutrition. This is less widespread in Vanuatu and Solomon Islands (Table 2).

Over a third of women of reproductive age in PNG and Solomon Islands and about a quarter of women in Vanuatu are anaemic (Table 2). As well as indications of under-nutrition, a significant proportion of adults in all three nations are obese and suffer from diabetes (Table 2). The combination of increasing consumption of imported staples and increasingly sedentary lifestyles has resulted in Pacific populations being not only among the most obese in the world, but have the highest prevalence of type 2 diabetes. Poor diet has also contributed to a number of other non-communicable diseases, such as increased hypertension and cardiovascular disease. These are overwhelmingly urban problems.

Table 2: Prevalence of under- and over-nutrition in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, by percentage

Parameter	PNG	Solomon Islands	Vanuatu
Stunting, children under-5	49.5	31.6	28.5
Overweight, children under-5	13.7	4.5	4.6
Wasting, children under-5	14.1	8.5	4.4
Anaemia, women of reproductive age	36.6	38.9	24.0
Obesity, adult women	25.8	27.1	30.1
Obesity, adult men	16.6	17.9	20.2
Diabetes, adult women	14.3	15.1	16.0
Diabetes, adult men	15.4	12.6	15.7

Source: Global Nutrition Report 2020

Issues of under- and over-nutrition (obesity) have implications for economic development. At a national level, they may be associated with a shortened life expectancy; reduced productivity in both subsistence and formal sectors; reduced possibility for children attaining their physical and intellectual potential; and high levels of stress on health systems.

### Threats to food security

**Rapid population growth:** One of the most important long-term threats to food security in the SW Pacific is rapid population growth. Given the high proportion of the population who live in rural villages and grow most of their own food, there is growing pressure on agricultural land leading to reduced soil fertility in many locations. In the islands and PNG lowlands, this pressure has been absorbed by the adoption of new food crops, particularly sweet potato. The dependence on sweet potato in some locations means that past gains in productivity are now being overtaken by population growth and pressure on land. This is particularly



marked in the PNG highlands where there are few alternative food crops that grow well at higher altitudes.

In response, large areas of other food crops are being planted by villagers, particularly bananas in the highlands; cassava in the lower areas (up to 1500 m); and 'English' potato at high altitude locations (over 2000 m). Land use is being intensified through either addition of organic matter or a rotation of sweet potato with peanuts. Despite these changes, as the population continues to increase there is increasing pressure on land and food security in many parts of PNG's central highlands.

The high dependence on sweet potato is also becoming an issue in Bougainville and Buka Islands where excessive soil moisture on sweet potato tubers has led to food supply vulnerability. This is being exacerbated by climate change.

**Climate extremes:** Subsistence food production is reduced by climatic extremes such as drought, cyclones and frost (Cobon et al. 2016). Recent examples include tropical cyclone Pam in Vanuatu in 2015, drought (and frost at very high altitudes) in PNG in 1997 and 2015 resulting in widespread food shortages (Allen and Bourke 2001; Kanua et al. 2016), and extended periods of very high rainfall. The impact of very high rainfall on tuber yield is generally underestimated but when rainfall is excessive, the above ground vegetation of the crop is particularly vigorous and the low yield not apparent until harvest time. The impact of very wet soils occurs in the first 6–8 weeks after planting, but the impact is not apparent until many months later during the tuber bulking phase.

**Other natural events:** Floods, landslides, earthquakes and tsunami can also destroy crops; however, the impact on food supply is generally much less than that from drought, frost and very high rainfall. Increasingly, pest and disease issues are affecting food gardens in the region but there is only limited information on their impact on yield.

**Climate change:** The climate in the region is changing rapidly with increasing temperatures, rising sea levels and changing rainfall patterns with further changes forecast (Lough et al. 2016). Rapid temperature increases in the New Guinea highlands have meant increases in the altitude at which crops can be grown. For example, coconuts bear at 1600m in the PNG highlands whereas 40 years ago, the very highest location at which nuts could be harvested was 1310m (Bourke 2010). Rising sea level is impacting on people on atolls and some other very small islands, with saline water now affecting production of the staple food swamp taro (*Cyrtosperma chamissonis*) on atolls east of Buka Island in PNG and the nearby Ontong Java atoll in Malaita Province, Solomon Islands. It is likely that increasing temperatures, rising sea levels and increasing rainfall will have a serious impact on the production of some food crops in coming decades (McGregor et al. 2016).

**Food security vulnerability:** Populations most vulnerable to food shortages are those living in remote areas with poor market access, limited access to health and education services, low cash income and, sometimes, limited capacity to gain outside assistance. People living on small islands

with a high to very high population density are particularly vulnerable, such as Tongoa, Paama and North Pentecost in Vanuatu or remote atolls and small islands in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Milne Bay Province and elsewhere in PNG. Other locations where people are particularly vulnerable in PNG include those at very high altitudes (over 2200m); those in locations between the central highlands and the lowlands; and the Strickland-Bosavi sub-region in Western Province.

**Nutrition, hygiene and health education:** Providing information on basic human nutrition, hygiene and health is a critically important way of improving the lives of rural villagers. It is particularly important to provide training to schoolteachers and schoolchildren as most of the latter group will be parents within a decade of leaving school.

## Conclusions

The majority of people in PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are rural villagers who produce most of their own food from gardens, tree crops, fishing and domestic animals. Sweet potato is the most important food crop in PNG and Solomon Islands. Other staples include banana, coconut, yam, cassava, sago, taro and tannia. These crops are also grown in Vanuatu, aside from sago, but no single crop is dominant. Over the past 80–140 years, food security has improved in these countries because of the adoption of more productive food crops, most of which were domesticated in Central and South America, access to cash that can be used to purchase food when subsistence supplies are inadequate, and, to a much lesser degree, support from urban-based family members.

Significant gains in human nutrition over the past 60 years have been documented, at least in PNG, and this is associated with access to cash from cash cropping. Nevertheless, undernutrition of children remains a major impediment to human development in all three nations, as does high levels of anaemia in women. A significant proportion of people in all three nations are obese and suffer from diabetes, particularly in urban areas.

Food security is threatened by rapid population growth and consequently more intensive land use and reduced soil fertility in many locations. Extreme climate events particularly drought, frost and prolonged periods of very high rainfall also reduce food supply in many parts of this sub-region. Global climate change is starting to impact food supply particularly on atolls and other very small islands, and this is likely to increase in coming decades. Villagers who have the greatest vulnerability to chronic and short-term food security generally live in more remote locations where access to markets, health facilities and cash income is limited.

Food security issues can be addressed through three main mechanisms:

- research and outreach to improve food production;
- greater access to cash income for rural villagers, with sale of agricultural produce the best option for most rural villagers; and
- education in basic human nutrition, hygiene and health for all those of school age.

## Note

1. Important studies include a major 1956 study in Sinasina, Simbu Province (Venkatachalam 1962) and a restudy in the same location in 1981 (Harvey and P Heywood 1983); the very comprehensive 1982–83 National Nutrition Survey and extensive analysis of this (Heywood, Singleton and Ross 1988; Mueller and Smith 1999; Mueller et al. 2001); and the 2018 IFPRI surveys in four lowland locations (Schmidt et al. 2019).

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# Food security and community development in the Pacific: Case studies from Fiji

*Suliasi Vunibola and Ilisoni Leweniqila, Massey University, New Zealand Introduction*

This paper considers the role of *bula vakavanua* (the Fijian way of life) in two indigenous Fijian communities, Saroni<sup>1</sup> and Bucalevu,<sup>2</sup> in helping rural villages achieve food security. Traditional mechanisms such as *solesolevaki* (cultural capital through collective work), together with monthly community work structures in place, can help households achieve food security. Revitalising these traditional mechanisms, encouraging wider use of them, and establishing legal frameworks for protecting traditional food security could have widespread benefits.

## Food security in the Pacific and Fiji

In the past, inter-island exchange and regular cultivation and storing of famine foods underpinned food security in many parts of the Pacific (Campbell 2014). However, for some time this inter-dependency has, to an extent, been replaced by dependence on food imported from outside the Pacific (Campbell 2006). The increased price of imported food is also creating new concerns about food security and the vulnerability of Pacific island countries (McGregor et al. 2009). The situation is exacerbated by the decline in availability of famine foods and other traditional forms of disaster resilience (Campbell 2014). Together with a reduction in community-based food production and political, social, cultural, and economic changes, there has been a marked decline of food security in the Pacific island countries (Gaillard and Mercer 2013).

## Traditional food security

Traditional foods are integral to the culture, history, and lifestyle of Pacific Island peoples and offer an insight into nutritional patterns and how they formed over time. As most PICs are ecologically vulnerable, food security was a cornerstone of most traditional Pacific Island societies. Through practising agroecological biodiversity, traditional food systems have been an essential element of ecosystem stability (Thaman et al. 2002). For example, tree crops like banana, plantain and breadfruit will survive flooding whereas yams, cassava and kumala (sweet potato) are resilient during cyclones. The abundance of production encouraged traditional food preservation and storage (Campbell 2006), including the use of *davuke* (underground storage) to preserve breadfruit, *kumala* and other root crops. These traditional food banks provided and allowed intra- and inter-community cooperation where mutual support, reciprocity, and indigenous exchange of food and food products were particularly important during times of hardship or extreme natural events within households, tribe, and *vanua* (Campbell 2015). For example, after Cyclone Winston in 2016 many districts in Fiji used resilient crops and famine food for survival. Famine foods in Fiji

include *dalo ni tana* (*Xanthosoma sagittifolium*), *via kau* (*Cyrtosperma merkusii*), *via kaile* (*Alocasia macrorrhiza*), (*Dioscorea bulbifera*), *bulou* (*Dioscorea bulbifera*), and *ota* (fern) (*Athyrium esculentum*) and (*Manihot esculenta*) cassava.

## Research methods

Our research in Saroni and Bucalevu villages was on-going throughout 2018 and continued to 2020. We used the Vanua Research Framework (VRF) (Nabobo-Baba 2008) – a widely accepted cultural research framework used by Pacific researchers. The framework, derived from the Kaupapa Maori Research Framework (Smith 2013), includes indigenous worldviews by developing and encouraging approaches that value cultural ways of being (Nabobo-Baba 2008). The VRF recognises the concept of *vanua* (tribe and the integrated nature of land, people and culture) as central to indigenous Fijian identity. Adhering to the VRF principles helps build a web of trust, respect and lifelong relationships with research participants.

## Our findings in Saroni village

The Saroni community-driven development initiative adopted its work structure from the Nayarabale Youth Farm work structure (Vunibola and Scheyvens 2019), which focuses on sustainable development for the community and improving general wellbeing. Four critical elements guide the weekly activities (see Table 1, next page).

The main focus in Saroni was the village commercial kava and taro farm. Driven by the youths, it involves the germination of planting materials in planter bags and transplanting to the fields. The villagers adopted the work plan structure which resulted in some immediate benefits. For instance, the plan gave the villagers a routine of work and better management of time. The work structure (Table 1, next page) was analysed by an elder of Saroni village who explained:

*Eitou samai muria na I tuvatuva mai Nayarabale sa bau yaga ni eimami sa mai bula vaaivaarau. Sa rairai totoa na yalovata ni caa na solesolevai. Sa raici na duavata ka sa raici viro ga na toso ni teitei ka dau maka i mada dina ni maka tu na sede. We followed the work structure from Nayarabale, and we saw immediate benefits as it allowed us to work in a monthly routine, which is always difficult for village life. People now work collectively at the farm and we can see rapid increase in farming activities and farm expansion. This is impossible when people work alone without any capital to pay for labour (Joti Tasere, January 10, 2020).*

However, the Saroni commercial farming intervention faced a hurdle three months after establishment. People

Table 1: Work structure of Saroni village

Week	Solesolevaki activities	Group involved	Venues
1	Youth farm	All youth members	Youth farm camp
2	Individual farms	Small youth groups who farm on the same location do their small <i>solesolevaki</i> , helping on the farms of other individuals.	Individual farm camps
3	Tribal food security	All tribe members	Village
4	Socio-cultural obligations (prescribed by the <i>vanua</i> , church, government or any visitors from outside the village)	All tribe members but the necessities for hospitality and cultural protocols (e.g., money, food, artefacts and transport) are provided by the youth farm. Members undertake activities like cooking and attending meetings and ceremonies.	Village

were having problems attending *solesolevaki* (collective work) and as a result, they were not able to follow their monthly routine. The people had a village meeting to identify the reasons for members not attending the work programs. They carried out *talanoa* (discussions) to work out their issues. The youth leader stated:

*Eitou sa vaataroga taucoo na veivuvale sa kai unei ni vuna levu dudua e yaco na leka iya ni maka na magiti. E ra dau lai vaakeketi magiti rava me ana ina na vuvale nib era na solesolevai, sa dodonu me eitou ca'ava ina e dua na a kai muri na loga ni yakona.* We carried out discussions with all families in the village and we realised that the main contributing factor for the difficulties of following the routine is the inability of families to have access to enough food. People need to look for food first before they can attend *solesolevaki*. We need to look at ways to rectify the issue of food security first before the commercial kava farm venture (Netani Naivalu, January 10, 2020).

To maximise attendance in *solesolevaki* programs the village reformed the work structure to boost the food security program which meant that time was allocated every week to food security both for individual families and for socio-cultural gatherings. For instance, the food security program in the third week is at the community garden which aims to provide food for socio-cultural gatherings and income. Two days a week (a total of ten days in a month) are dedicated to *solesolevaki* (collective work) on individual household vegetable gardens and staple crop farms. Arieta Vulakome, a mother and the women's group leader, commented:

*Eimami sa mai yalokisi ni sa lewe levu e ra maka ni kai dau lao I solesolevai baleta ma sa une na ena asia. Ia na leka dina eimami dau sotava na yalewa ei na yakiti*

*ni dau maka na magiti e tu I vale. Na ena sa ca'a vaalevu na loga ni magiti sa eimami taleitaina na marama.* We were disheartened by the disruption of the monthly program as we saw the benefits but in reality, the women and children suffered as the food at home was insecure. Developing our food gardens will alleviate many challenges we face (Arieta Vulakome, January 9, 2020).

The reformed work structure, with a focus on food security for communal and family purposes, was followed for the next five months. This not only allowed enough food for the families but resulted in easier access to the food gardens for women and children when the men were away doing *solesolevaki* (see Table 2).

Table 2: Reformed work structure of Saroni village

Week	Solesolevaki activities	Group and days involved	Food security
1	Youth farm	All youth members work on the commercial farm on Thursday and Friday	Tuesday and Wednesday for family food gardens
2	Individual farms	Small youth groups who farm at the same location do their small <i>solesolevaki</i> , helping on other individual's farms. Members do this on Thursday and Friday.	Tuesday and Wednesday for family food gardens
3	Tribal food security	All tribe (village) members. Members will do this on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.	Village members work on the community food gardens for <i>oga</i> (socio-cultural gatherings and obligations)
4	Socio-cultural obligations (prescribed by the <i>vanua</i> , church, government or any visitors from outside the village)	All tribe members but the necessities for hospitality and cultural protocols (e.g. money, food, artefacts and transport) are provided by the youth farm. Members do activities like cooking and attending meetings and ceremonies. This is done from Thursday to Saturday.	Tuesday and Wednesday for family food gardens

Evaluation after five months saw an improved village in terms of economic and community development and the general wellbeing of the community. By placing more emphasis on food security activities, sufficient food was produced for families, *to'ato'a* (extended family) and *matakali* (sub-clan).

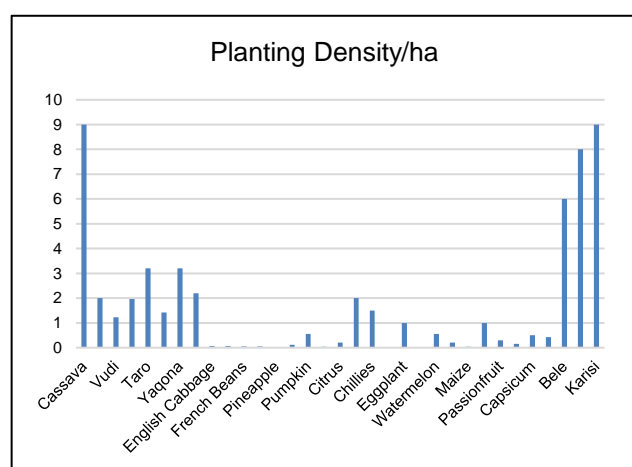
Saroni village crop records include a measurement of the food security status of every household showing their access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets the food preferences and diet necessary for an active and healthy life. The crop record also shows the planting density

of each crop cultivated in the village. Planting density records provide a guide for farmers on total crops planted and the total land area developed allowing farmers to make informed decisions on what best to produce on the site.

Planting density in Figure 2 was reached using the following formula:

$$\text{Plant Density} = \frac{\text{Total number of plants on the ground in crop}}{\text{Required total number of plants per hectare in a crop}}$$

Figure 2: Total number of root crops and assorted vegetables at Saroni village



## Research in Bucalevu village

In the past, the farming work structure of Bucalevu village was the combination of the indigenous Fijian calendar (*Vula Vaka-Viti*), which is based on planting and fishing seasons, and a monthly agriculture work program. To be successful, local NGO food production development projects needed people to be actively involved in the *solesolevaki* program. However, there was little individual commitment to the project although village leaders identified food security as a problem for every household. This led in 2017 to the rearrangement of the work structure. With traditional knowledge, the researchers, the Ministry of Primary Industries, and the Ra Provincial Office, designed a work structure that the village people were happy with (see Table 3).

Three months after restructuring to revive food security for each of the 42 households in Bucalevu, wellbeing (*bula sautu*) was achieved, as explained by one of the elders:

*Ena rawati ga na bulasautu ena bula i vakavakarau kei na solesolevaki oqo nai yavu ni bula dina e Bucalevu. Wellbeing could be attained by managing our time following a structured work plan and, most importantly, through solesolevaki (collective work or cultural capital/currency) a resilient mechanism handed down from our ancestors (Waisake, July 2 2019).*

Bucalevu managed to achieve food security, which allows them to practice '*veivoli vaka itei*' (exchanging food products within the community and other communities). This program has promoted the self-sufficiency of food to Bucalevu village, enabling them to accommodate socio-cultural obligations.

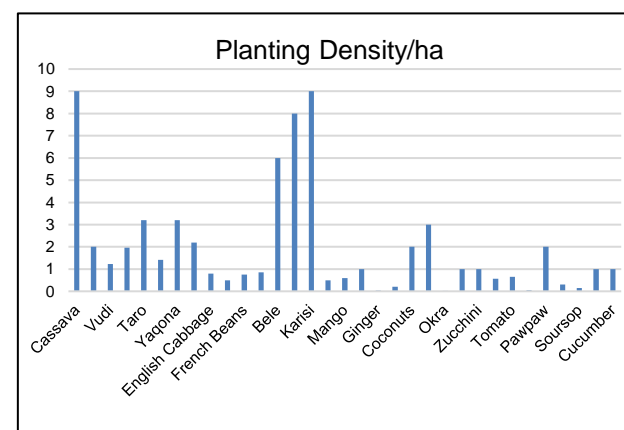
Table 3: Work structure of Bucalevu village

Time Schedule	Activity	Weeks	Focus	Hours	Comments
6am to 6.30am	Family prayer	1	Koro (Village)	8am to 12pm	2 days dedicated to this work; the other days given to individual
6.30am to 7am	Prep for kids	2	Mataqali (sub-clan)	8am to 12pm	2 days dedicated to this work; the other days given to individual
8am to 12pm	<i>Solesolevaki</i>	3	<i>Solesolevaki</i>	8am to 4pm	Working collectively on the farms
12pm to 1.30pm	Lunch	4	Matanitu (government visit)	8am to 4pm	3 days dedicated to this work; the other days for <i>solesolevaki</i>
1.30pm to 4pm	Individual farms	Family time is essential to every household for sharing some traditional knowledge purposes for every young generation.			
4pm to 8.30pm	Family time				
9pm	Bedtime				

Record keeping is also essential for Bucalevu farmers and a successful farm manager keeps accurate records and has established a sound recordkeeping system. A crop record includes the date of planting, crop or assorted vegetable name, the number of plants planted, and expected harvested time. Planting density on Figure 3 was attained using this formula:

$$\text{Plant Density} = \frac{\text{Total number of plants on the ground in crop}}{\text{Required total number of plants per hectare in a crop}}$$

Figure 3: Total number of root crops and assorted vegetables at Bucalevu village



Maintaining these records enable the farmers to make informed decisions for the future and better organise their land-management practices, including crop rotation and pest control.

## Food as a cultural component

Food is a critical component of Pacific culture and other indigenous groups globally, and this is visible in any function or gathering. Having enough food for the family and socio-cultural obligations therefore are the ultimate aims for indigenous Fijians in rural Fiji. A way to achieve this demand is to include food security programs in the work structure followed by village members. In both case studies, following the daily routines is found to contribute to *bula vakaivakarau* (disciplined village life); *yalomatua ni vakayagataki gauna* (wise use of time) and *solesolevaki* (social and cultural capital) where people pool resources and labour for the common good. Once there is an abundance of food to cater for household needs and socio-cultural obligations, villagers are able to use crops as a commodity to sell at the market for family income.

## Discussion

Community-based development in the Pacific has been the focus of local and international development agencies for many years with the aim of improving the wellbeing of Pacific people. However, there remains the serious question – how should community-development structures be planned and executed to achieve the aspired goals? We have found that community development interventions do not always recognise the interrelated and interconnected components or reality of specific geographical locations. Development plans, feasibility structures and frameworks are prepared in advance of workers being recruited to implement the intervention. Due to the interwoven systems of *bula vakavanua* (way of life signified by the culture, tradition, and customary land), community development initiatives can be challenging and such challenges occur when community development initiatives focus specifically on the project itself rather than having a holistic view of the highly connected, interwoven community components which can include social, physical, environmental and spiritual factors (Holland 2006; Morse et al. 2013).

One of the major components of rural subsistence communities in the Pacific is the capacity of *matavuvale* (family) to attain food security. Food security in the communities studied not only refers to families' access to enough food but also access to nutritious foods that suit their dietary needs and socio-cultural obligations (Campbell 2015). A critical element of indigenous economic development on customary land in Fiji is being able to provide financial support for socio-cultural responsibilities, which also contribute to business sustainability and improve community partnership (Vunibola and Scheyvens 2019). Similarly, families need to have access to enough food for subsistence consumptions and also for socio-cultural gatherings like weddings, catering for

church gatherings, and other social occasions and obligations. The new food security program enables the establishment of separate farms catering for gatherings, which ensures that families have enough food and there is sufficient for social-cultural obligations.

Food security for families in the community provides a stable platform for sustainable community development projects. Governments or non-government organisations fund community projects which could also be community driven (for instance, Saroni case study). The findings of this research suggest that food security not only improves the participation of village people but is also linked to the longevity and sustainability of any community development initiative.

## Notes

1. Saroni village is in Dogotuki district, Macuata.
2. Bucalevu village is in Nakorotubu district in west Viti Levu.

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# Securing coastal fisheries in the Pacific: Critical resources for food, livelihood and community security

*Joeli Veitayaki, University of the South Pacific*

The deteriorating health of Pacific coastal fisheries represents insurmountable security challenges. Years of increasing use and production with little concern for the ecological wellbeing of fisheries resources have resulted in altered and polluted habitats and resource depletion. In addition, Pacific nations have to secure their maritime zones and their resources from better organised, equipped and often unscrupulous operators. They also need to give serious attention to their coastal fisheries.

Coastal areas in the Pacific host important habitats, such as sand and mudflats, seagrass beds, mangroves and coral reefs, all of which must be effectively managed to support the diverse ecological, economic, cultural and social interests of the people. These coastal fisheries provide food security and nutrition, community resilience, economic growth and employment, poverty alleviation and the empowerment of local communities. They are under threat. They consist of subsistence, artisanal and commercial fisheries, as well as aquaculture and recreational fishing – activities that are important but poorly understood despite their economic importance. Coastal fisheries include a diverse range of traditional and contemporary fishing methods and gear that reflect the multiple species fished and are also home to unique marine biodiversity and commercial activities that are vulnerable to intensive resource use. Unfortunately, Pacific islanders have not effectively managed these critical resources and sources of livelihood, causing their decline and eventual collapse. These fisheries are not expected to cope with the combined devastating impact of climate change, over exploitation and worsening pollution.

In addition to these challenges, Pacific small island developing states (SIDS) are scattered across the world's largest ocean where tropical cyclones, storms, floods and droughts represent security threats that Pacific citizens must address to effectively manage their coastal fisheries. Additional security threats such as environmental degradation, globalisation, organised crime, demographic changes, deficient state capacity, poor governance, eroding social cohesion and political crises must also be addressed to ensure the security and continuity of coastal fisheries. Activities required to secure coastal fisheries include controlling overfishing and the degradation of coastal habitats, and empowering all involved stakeholders to be responsible for the health of the coastal environment. In addition, COVID-19 has redefined security in an interdependent world and has reminded humanity that environmental resources have limits that cannot be crossed. COVID-19 has also heightened the need to reconsider our development strategies and the need to focus on the sustainable use of natural resources to support economic development and the wellbeing of our communities. This paper considers the way forward to ensure the long-term security of access to fisheries stocks that are vital to Pacific livelihoods and economies.

## Importance of coastal fisheries

Coastal fisheries provide the majority of the local protein supply in the SIDS (Gillett 2011), which makes their security and sustainability critical for nations that have the responsibility to manage these resources and provide for those that rely on their fish catches. These states are working individually and collaboratively to assure the security and sustainability of these resources, requiring innovation and commitment from all stakeholders within the Pacific as well as those from outside.

Coastal fisheries contributed an estimated US\$300m (A\$390m) annually to the GDP of Pacific SIDS and territories in 2014 (Gillett 2016) and employed around 100,000 people, with subsistence fisheries engaging 10–20 times more people than commercial fisheries (Hanich et al. 2018:279). Women constitute approximately 25 per cent of small-scale fishers and account for 56 per cent of the landings (Harper et al. 2013) that include invertebrates, such as shellfish and holothurians. Fisheries are the main source of protein for Pacific islanders of whom, 89 per cent consume fish weekly (Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) data from 10 PICTs 2012–16). Per capita fish consumption rate is 37 kg per person per annum ranging between 20 kg to 110 kg (HIES data 15 PICTs mainly 2001–06). While human population densities throughout the region have been relatively low until recent times allowing fishing areas to remain productive, development and population growth over the last three decades have resulted in the overexploitation of coastal fisheries, which will soon not meet the requirements in 16 of the 22 Pacific island countries (SPC 2008; Bell et al. 2009).

## Security challenges

The management of coastal fisheries is complicated by lack of data, altered ecosystems, high demand, heavy exploitation, uncertain scientific information, unpredictable resource management outcomes, heightened economic development demands and ineffective implementation of management measures (Holland 2010). These factors influence the security of coastal fisheries that are related to the safety of the people involved, food security, ecological security, territorial security and the security of offshore fish stocks. Pacific states must effectively address these threats because their viability 'as independent nation states hinges on the capacity of their lagoon and coastal fisheries to ensure food security and livelihoods' (Hanich 2018:281).

## Security of people

Traditionally, Pacific islanders enjoyed food security resulting from the range of food sources available including subsistence farming, barter, selling, fishing and hunting.

This arrangement has been eroded and replaced by commercialisation, urbanisation and the reliance on cheap and poor quality imported foods (Connell and Lowitt 2019). The importance of coastal fisheries and the health of ocean ecosystems are critical to the cultural, social and economic wellbeing of Pacific peoples, especially during times of crisis.

Growing human populations, along with changes in lifestyle associated with modernisation and global trade, have put enormous pressure on coastal fisheries (Beyerl et al. 2018). In addition, increasing demand for food and higher living standards require higher and regular income to pay for water, power and sewerage facilities, modern houses, roads and a wide range of consumer goods. Land clearing and urbanisation are associated with declines in water quality and the health of coral reefs and associated habitats (Dutra et al. in press).

Safety is a concern because people are venturing further into the ocean in the hope of making a better catch. In one such case, two Kiribati fishermen survived almost four weeks drifting in the Pacific Ocean in 2013 (Australian News Network 2013). The men, aged 20 and 40, were on a fishing trip off Banaba Island in the Gilbert Islands when strong winds pushed their 14-foot boat towards the Solomon Islands. They were rescued by a US ship passing through the area after surviving on raw fish and rainwater, before they were found, more than 675 kilometres away from home.

## **Food security**

Food security is a glaring challenge because increasing population, commercialisation and the need for increased income has forced people to sell their best food sources for cash. In addition, the desire to take up paid employment has taken people out of their villages and into areas where they are unlikely to afford the healthy and nutritious food they used to source from their gardens and the sea. Moreover, the promotion of fisheries development projects is increasing the demand for reef fish thus worsening coastal fishing pressure in the region (Cinner and McClanahan 2006).

With more than two thirds of the animal protein consumed in coastal villages coming from fish (Zeller et al. 2015), one can understand why reef overfishing is common throughout the Pacific (Bell et al. 2017). Overfishing reduces the abundance and size of reef fish and also presents negative consequences for reproduction. In locations where herbivorous fish species are targeted, overfishing can accelerate reef bio-erosion and reduce fish biodiversity and productivity (Doropoulos et al. 2013).

## **Ecological security**

Climate change affects the interactions between the ocean, land and the atmosphere, which influences the health and productivity of the biosphere, society and economy. Increasing ocean acidity and rising sea levels are damaging marine ecosystems including coral reefs, seagrass beds and mangroves that sustain healthy marine environments and coastal fisheries (Dutra et al. in press).

Increased and unregulated use of pesticides and chemical fertilisers, land clearing, changes in land use and infrastructure development, which can lead to increased sediment and nutrient runoffs into coastal waters have degraded coral reefs and affected the fisheries. Forest conversion, logging and mining threaten biodiversity and worsen climate change impacts, which affect unique habitats such as mangroves and coastal systems critical for healthy fisheries. Imagine the ongoing devastation caused by the sediment load from the Rewa River floods that brings approximately 107 tonnes per year to its estuaries and beyond (Hasan 1986). Serious sewage contamination has been reported for many years in the main urban and development centers such as Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia (Morrison 1999), Fanga'uta Lagoon, Tonga (Zann 1994), Coral Coast and Suva Lagoon, Fiji (Naidu et al. 1991; Naidu et al. 2018).

Collapsed fisheries across the Pacific highlight the need to align fisheries development to the capacities of the fish stocks. Although deteriorating coastal fisheries have been reported for at least 30 years (Kailola 1995; Pita 1996), lack of data and the multiple types of species being fished have made management complicated as fishers quickly move to a new commodity after noticing depletion in the stocks they are harvesting. Resource management and the rehabilitation of fisheries resources must engage local stakeholders to be effective.

The sustainability of fisheries is also threatened by the pursuit of conflicting government development objectives, poor planning, inaccessible markets, lack of attention to environment management, lack of understanding of the complex social and cultural conditions, insufficient human resources and a lack of evaluation. Fish production has increased considerably in recent decades, threatening the health of the fisheries stock. Improved post-harvest processing and collection of products from rural areas for sale in urban and overseas markets has greatly enhanced the commercial use of fisheries in areas far from the main centres, making fisheries management difficult. The correct balance between resource use and management needs to be strictly adhered to.

## **Territorial security**

Pacific states have declared extensive maritime zones that need to be effectively managed and controlled. While Pacific SIDS were transformed by the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea into large ocean island states with new wealth and potential resources, they were required to fulfill their obligations under the convention. Pacific countries have formed regional institutions such as the Pacific Islands Forum, Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) to support their members in the pursuit of their rights and the delivery of their responsibilities.

Illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing is the biggest security threat to the sustainable management of coastal fisheries. IUU is rampant at local and international levels. Recently, Vietnamese fishermen moved into the



western Pacific islands in search of reef resources such as sea cucumber, giant clams, trochus, lobster and fish (Marango 2017). The 'blue boats' are undetectable at sea but have been caught in several Pacific island countries including Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, PNG, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and New Caledonia (Radio NZ 2017). In Solomon Islands, 40 blue boats crews were each fined US\$99 (A\$128) while the boat owners were fined US\$1.59m (A\$2.06m) (Loopsamoa 2017) for illegally entering the country.

Fisheries development is often undertaken haphazardly without proper stock assessment, feasibility studies or impact assessments. In addition, there is limited appreciation of the relationships between offshore resources, coral reefs and mangrove forests, resulting in poor decision-making that threatens the sustainability of these resources. Links between islands and continental slopes and food webs for tuna occur via the planktonic/larval phase of coral reef fish and via micronekton, while post-larvae from populations of coral reef fish and invertebrates have been found in the stomach of tuna (Le Borgne et al. 2011:212).

Transshipment involves the quick transfer of fish from the fishing ground to the market. It is a vital part of the commercial fishing industry, involving hundreds of refrigerated carrier ships roaming the oceans taking in catch from thousands of fishing vessels and transporting it for processing on shore (Pew Trust 2019). Transshipments can take place at sea or in specified ports where 'unscrupulous fishing vessel operators can obscure, manipulate, or otherwise falsify data on their fishing practices, the species or amounts caught or transferred, and catch locations' (ibid.). Proper control of transshipment is critical to improving the 'health of diminishing fish stocks' and safeguarding the proceeds to host nations. In the western and central Pacific Ocean, over US\$142m (A\$184m) worth of IUU product is transhipped each year and is misreported or unreported by licensed fishing vessels. These activities harm the livelihoods of those who fish legally, undermine fisheries conservation and management and contribute to global overfishing and the trafficking of people, drugs and weapons.

## Security of offshore fish stocks

Pacific nations are obligated to sustainably manage fisheries resources in their maritime areas, even though they do not have the capacity or the resources to exert effective control over their maritime areas, which are undetermined in some cases. Pacific SIDS must meet their international obligations as sovereign governments committed to playing their role to minimize IUU activities.

IUU activities undermine the capacity of the Pacific SIDS to manage and conserve their tuna resources (World Bank 1996). Although Pacific SIDS have formulated innovative regional and subregional fisheries management institutions to protect their resources, these must be effectively implemented and enforced. The FFA advises its

members on tuna fisheries management and development issues and has successfully negotiated their regional fisheries management organisation, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), to collaborate with their distant water fishing nation partners in the sustainable use of the region's fisheries resources.

The lack of capacity in Pacific SIDS to enforce compliance or exemptions, as well as the incompatibility of national, subregional and regional objectives weakens regional management arrangements and compromises the equitable sharing of benefits from the use of fisheries resources. These factors threaten the sustainable management and development of fisheries resources in the Pacific islands, which puts at risk those dependent on them.

Deep seabed mining is also a major concern given the negative impact on the ocean of any disturbance of the ocean floor. Unfortunately, Pacific SIDS regard the mining of deep seabed minerals as a welcomed opportunity for economic diversification and growth and have based their marine space claims over it (Giron 2016). PNG has been working with Nautilus Minerals for the development of hydrothermal sulphides in its economic exclusion zone. It is essential that Pacific SIDS implement a carefully planned strategy of maritime power, 'which assumes a strong assertion of maritime sovereignty' (Giron 2016:95).

Some Pacific SIDS may be disregarding the sustainability of their resources to ensure the attainment of short-term development goals. Hau'ofa (2008:48) reminded us of the risk as our countries and people scramble to carve a future in:

an age when our societies are preoccupied with the pursuit of material wealth, when the rampant market economy brings out unquenchable greed and amorality in us.

This is illustrated by fisheries developments that are pursued without proper consideration of the fish stocks, increasing numbers of highly efficient fishers, reactionary rather than properly planned resource management, ineffective management measures and coastal states paying lip service to sustainable fisheries development.

## The way forward

Secure access to productive fish stocks is fundamental to sustaining Pacific livelihoods, economies and wellbeing. Sustaining our coastal fisheries resources is our ultimate goal and challenge given the multiple species that must be managed in a healthy environment, the dependence of people on coastal resources for food, the growing demand associated with higher populations, and the increasing commercial use of the resources and the enormous areas that have to be managed. Although sustainable fisheries are included in the region's strategic frameworks, these frameworks have to be effectively aligned and implemented. Pacific SIDS must formulate, implement and enforce appropriate fisheries development policies, strategies and activities.

The management of known endangered keystone species such as sharks, turtles (Sabinot and Bernard 2016), Maori wrasse, rock cod, coral trout, giant clams and *beche de mer* should be a part of an integrated development and management plan for coastal fisheries. Finding a solution for such overexploited resources will not be easy but must start with the education and empowerment of all our people on the changes that need to be undertaken (Aqorau 2014). As we have witnessed with the community-based management of marine resources, major accomplishments are made when all of our people are empowered and supported to play active roles in the management of resources many of them own.

Palau is leading the fight to have vibrant and healthy coral reefs as the basis of sustainable development that supports strong and robust economies. Working under the Micronesia Challenge with the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam and the Marshall Islands, Palau pledged to protect 30 per cent of its coral reefs and 20 per cent of its forest resources by 2020, as well as contribute to the global coral reef conservation targets (Micronesian Challenge 2020). These countries have heightened marine resource management, and solicited much needed funds and technological assistance from international partners to support local initiatives and advocate the importance of taking appropriate action at all levels of governance.

Regional cooperation is the logical approach to address shared issues such as minimising IUU fishing and resource depletion and promoting environmental management, community-based fisheries management and the use of innovative new methods such as aerial surveillance and digital data collection and analysis in support of evidence based decision-making and formulating appropriate management responses. However, effective regional management arrangements will only be accomplished through enhanced regional integration, which will be compromised if:

individual states pursue different objectives based on their own interest, because the success of regional resource management arrangements depends on the resemblance of objectives of member states and the compatibility of regional and national policies and strategies (Aqorau 2014).

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# Resource security in Papua New Guinea: Linking resources, development and security

*Glenn Banks, Massey University, New Zealand*

## Introduction

The effects of Papua New Guinea's 40 years of natural resource dependence are ambiguous, contested and run deep. The minerals and petroleum sector has been the 'backbone' of the formal economy since Independence and dominates international trade and investment within the country, links numerous sectors such as finance, manufacturing and construction, makes up a significant proportion of GDP, has contributed significantly to government taxation, and is an important component of the skills development and skilled employment of the workforce. The extractives sector in Papua New Guinea has also created challenges that are consistent with many of the features of the so-called 'resource curse' or the belief that resource extraction often does not contribute to sustainable social and economic improvements in mineral resource dependent countries. Hence, there has been limited diversification away from mineral dependence since independence, and the high dependence on the extractive sector has produced a form of resource insecurity marked by reduced government capacity, rising corruption, and increased conflict, inequality and structural poverty.

In this context, a discussion of Papua New Guinea's extractive industries and the concept of 'resource security' is instructive, and provides a useful lens to more broadly examine the ways in which 'development' itself is represented in the country. In this context, resource security can most broadly be defined as ensuring that natural resources are abundant and available enough to prevent a lack or scarcity of water, food, energy or other basic elements of life. Without this resource security, a state of resource *insecurity* is produced, marked by shortages of water, food, or land, any of which can trigger drought, hunger, conflict, and poverty. Translating this notion of resource security to the Papua New Guinea extractives industry produces a two-fold distinction between resource security at the national level and a more local view of what resource security might mean. It is also apparent that the notion of security itself depends very much on the perspective adopted; resource security for a project developer means something different to that of a government official. At the local level, notions of security and insecurity also intersect with other critical development discourses such as rights, capabilities, vulnerability and resilience.

The term 'resource security' only makes sense in PNG, and is only useful as an explanatory concept, if we adopt it through the eye of the beholder. Overarching external analyses of PNG as a 'resource insecure state' (a parallel, cause or consequence of it being regarded as a 'weak state') need a sharper and at the same time more nuanced understanding of the ways in which communities (and the state) operate in terms of access to and the utility of natural

resources in Papua New Guinea. In particular, acknowledging the importance of the relational worldview that dominates Melanesian lifeworlds becomes central to both understanding local concepts of resource security, and for developing policy and pathways forward.

## Indications and representations of development in PNG

The UNDP National Human Development Report (NHDR) (UNDP 2014) provides both a snapshot of development indicators across a range of key sectors and a narrative that connects the extractive sector to these indicators. In basic terms, Papua New Guinea is now ranked 155th out of 189 countries in terms of its Human Development Index (HDI), with a score of 0.543, putting it at the top of the list of Low Human Development countries in the UNDP HDR (UNHDR) 'league table'. This is up two places from 2014 and the Index score itself has risen from 0.491 (2013). The World Bank though, continues to place Papua New Guinea in its Lower Middle Income category.

The disconnect between the Middle Income status and the Low Human Development rank points to the substantial value of resource exports (over K200bn since Independence) and significant economic flows through the government and the economy from the sector that have not translated into improvements in other broader-based aspects of development. Health and education indicators that contribute to the HDI alongside the economic measures have not been tracking upwards systematically. Some standard health measures have tracked positively – life expectancy at the national level in Papua New Guinea for example has officially increased from below 40 years in 1960, to over 64 years in 2017 (World Bank database). Other aspects and indicators of health have moved slower such as Maternal Mortality Rates (MMR) or even in some cases reversed, such as with tuberculosis numbers. Likewise, education indicators point to some improvements such as increased access to primary education over the past 20 years, but many remain very poor such as retention rates through the system, and an average level of formal education for adults in Papua New Guinea of just 3.9 years in 2012 (UNDP 2014:50). While the connections (and disconnections) are complex, this failure to turn resource wealth into broadly conceived social improvements sits behind much of the criticism of PNG's resource-dependent development to date.

The NHDR (UNDP 2014) also noted that:

Poverty levels do not appear to have changed significantly since 1996, despite an economy that has grown at almost 6.5 per cent per annum over the past decade (p.3).

While measures of poverty in PNG have been contentious (see Gibson 2005; UNDP 2014, 28–31), there is no evidence that any form of poverty (basic-needs or food poverty, for example) has significantly reduced. And although there is no reliable measure of inequality (the most recent Gini coefficient calculations were done in 2009) the fact that there has been rising GNP/capita and national wealth without a linked drop in poverty rates indicates growing inequality, something that is also widely evidenced anecdotally.

There are two axes of inequality, in particular, that cut across any discussions of broad-based development in Papua New Guinea. First, there are stark differences between male and female indicators of development. The NHDR (2014:3) states:

the very poor indicators relating to gender disparity and inequality, with women in Papua New Guinea having consistently lower education and health indicators, and being subject to high levels of gender-based violence.

There are also significant differences in development and inequality by geographic location. There is a strong urban/rural divide across most indicators of development and provincial level indicators show:

after the National Capital District (NCD), the five provinces that make up the Island region of Papua New Guinea (the provinces of Manus, New Ireland, East and West New Britain, and Bougainville) have higher levels of achievement of the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) (and hence higher human development) than the rest of the country (along with Milne Bay) (p.57).

These various dimensions of inequality – none of which appear to be reducing – are in part a consequence of differing geographies, access, histories, and resources. Location of and access to different natural resources (land, forests, minerals, water etc) varies significantly for communities across the country. At the sub-national level this variation produces differing levels of resource security and insecurity.

In sum, natural resources and particularly the extractive industries in Papua New Guinea are a central element of PNG's development narrative. The NHDR illustrates how the effects of mining, oil and gas dominate the formal economy, and the lack of translation of mineral revenues into broad-based forms of development is regarded as one of the major failures in the country's development history.

## Resource security at the national level

Many of the issues in PNG's extractives sector certainly speak to rising insecurities at national and local levels, but they tend to be framed as impacts, 'curses' and corporate responsibilities.

Resource security at the national level is discussed in two related but distinct ways, each of which is driven by different actors. The dominant 'resource security' discourse arises in relation to state regulation and *security of access* to mineral resources for multinational corporate investors.

The NHDR noted that in 'Bohre Dolbear's 2013 version of its 'Ranking of Countries for Mining Investment, "Where Not to Invest", Papua New Guinea was ranked 22nd out of 25 countries on "managing social issues", "permitting delays" and corruption' (p.10). Multinational corporate investors rate 'resource security' in PNG poorly as they have concerns about securing continuing access to the mineral resource they are mining, along with contractual adherence by the State. While this has been a long-standing concern, recent events in relation to the Porgera gold mine have brought the issue to the fore again.

The refusal of the State to renew the Special Mining Lease (SML) for the corporate (Canadian and Chinese) owners of the Porgera mine has led to charges of expropriation and internationally-mediated legal action. The rationale provided for this action by the State was an inability to agree to terms for the renewal which would have delivered appropriate benefits to the State and local communities, a charge that the company disputed (Burton and Banks 2020). Although it does appear that a settlement may at least partially restore access of the investors to the operation, this reduced 'security' has occurred in the context of broader resource nationalism which itself seeks to 'secure' these mineral resources for the nation (NHDR 2014). Papua New Guinea's 'insecurity' is a result of political shifts and continuing *access* is the defining issue for both the investor and the state.

A second perspective on resource security would argue that while the security of the resources themselves is not threatened (except through exhaustion of the resource which at present seems distant), access to *revenues from these resources* is insecure. For example, the forestry sector has provided very low returns to the nation for decades due to transfer pricing and corruption. Neither the national government nor the majority of those in communities affected by the industry have secured significant sustainable returns from the sector as a result of poorly framed and enforced agreements.

The volatility of mineral revenue which is a result of a complex interaction between global commodity prices, corporate profitability and Mining and Petroleum fiscal regimes and agreement, also produces insecurity for the state. Recently, commodity price fluctuations, fiscal terms and revenue distribution agreements meant the returns to the national government from mining and petroleum during 2014–17 were at their lowest levels in 25 years despite export values being at record highs thanks to the initiation of the PNG LNG project (Banks and Namorong 2018). In most instances, the risks associated with this insecurity are borne heavily by the State.

'Abundance' and 'access' then play into understandings of security at the national level. This 'resource revenue insecurity' has very real developmental effects as it creates a lack of certainty that in turn constrains the ability of the State to plan for and commit to long-term national development programs and budget trajectories. This then makes the link between mineral resources and development planning *insecure* at the national level.

## Insecurities at the local level

Mining and the extractive sector have a particularly poor record in terms of local impacts in Papua New Guinea, and these impacts are all closely associated with growing levels of insecurity.

The most obvious signs of extraction compromising security are the environmental and social effects experienced in the vicinity of the operations (and often some distance away). Mining in particular transforms landscapes and environments. Forests are removed, mountains razed and valleys filled through the construction and waste materials from mines. Waterways are typically polluted, often at levels that persist for hundreds of kilometres downstream. The Ok Tedi mine in Western province became emblematic of the effects of waste materials on river systems (see Banks and Ballard 1997), but similar destruction has been apparent in relation to Bougainville, Porgera and Wafi. Forests, agricultural land and fresh water supplies are all reduced in extent and quality. Access to such resources is likewise compromised – often severely – for local communities, and water, food and land security all come under increasing pressure. The NHDR (UNDP 2014:61-62) uses the Porgera mine to illustrate the relationship between poor social and environmental conditions and resource insecurity in surrounding communities which make deadly conflict highly likely. A recent study from Bougainville (Human Rights Law Centre 2020) showed that environmental legacies from these large-scale mines can impact resource access for communities for decades after the mine closes.

It is also clear that at the operational level, these threats to environmental security are entwined with social and economic processes that threaten human security. Increasing migration (Bainton and Banks 2018), growing inequalities, and the ‘social pathologies’ associated with mining (alcohol, gambling, prostitution, and other illegal activities) produce situations in these communities where human rights violations are common, where human capability development is reduced, and the threats to human security are numerous and sustained.

Growing insecurities in the community pose a threat to the security of the mine operation. Attacks on staff, equipment, vehicles and camps obviously affect continuing operations of the mines and oilfields. The response is the development of corporate security and the increasing presence of police and para-military state forces. Not surprisingly, this securitisation of the resource operations often feeds growing insecurities in the communities, with many of the recorded human rights violations at Porgera being committed by these private and state security forces (Human Rights Watch 2010). The responses to violence and insecurity often produce the conditions that generate more violence and insecurity around resource extraction sites.

It is also worth considering a more locally-focused community lens in these contexts. Every aspect of Melanesian life was defined by the relationships individuals constructed with other peoples and the environments they lived in including their connections to land, their place within societies, and even the very foundations of their own individual identity (Strathern 1988). Tightly bound relationships based on

reciprocity, of dependency and of protection formed a central element of security for individuals and communities.

Relationships then form a critical and often understated axis for a locally-conceived notion of ‘resource security’, one that takes in elements of human security, human rights and human capability approaches within the Melanesian relationally-oriented worldview. To give one example, human rights abuses committed by an external party (recent migrants or a mining company security officer) may spark a collective response that can destabilise other relationships i.e. ‘tribal fighting’ at Porgera, regularly sparked by tensions over mine compensation and exacerbated by migrants, frequently become deadly and complex conflicts that compromised security for many within the community (Burton 2014, Jacka 2019).

At the local level, as with the national level, resource security can then take a number of forms, coming from differing but often intersecting perspectives on security, each of which necessitates us asking what is being secured, by whom, and from who? The paradoxical movement that sees some stakeholders seeking to securitise resources in ways that actually increase the likelihood that others will face growing security threats is an outcome of these conflicting understandings of the origins and motivations that generate security and insecurity.

## Conclusions

Natural resources and their exploitation and/or conservation are central to most of the development narratives narrated in, by, and about Papua New Guinea. Analysing resource security can provide additional insights into these representations of development, and highlight some of the gaps and exclusions within these existing representations and narratives.

At the national scale, there are tensions between a global sector that places a premium on stability and security (or continuity of access to resources and leases), and a nation-state concerned with securing consistent flows of revenue from extractive industries to be able to consistently and predictably fund broad-based development. These narratives meet at the negotiating table, when mining agreements and fiscal terms are settled. Recent history in Papua New Guinea suggests that neither multinational corporations nor the nation-state are satisfied with existing arrangements as leases continue to be contested, and fluctuations in resource revenues continue to be a constraint on more effective service delivery and development.

At local levels, resource security is compromised by growing inequalities, environmental destruction, and conflict within communities and between communities, the State, and resource developers. Resource insecurity drives multi-dimensional forms of poverty, where people and communities are subjected to growing social and economic insecurity. And paradoxically, it appears that the more corporations invest in securitising their operations, the greater the security risks to those operations as community insecurity increases and conflicts intensify. Critically, for Melanesian communities, relational values are central to how

security and development is understood, meaning that discussions of resource security at local levels should account for the ways in which Melanesian peoples frame their livelihoods and communities around kinship, reciprocity, dependency and relational constructions of identity.

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# A cultural basis for land and livelihood security: The Guadalcanal Plains Palm Oil Limited, Landowners Association & Company, Solomon Islands

Gordon Leua Nanau, University of the South Pacific and Lincy Penderverana,  
Solomon Islands National University

Guadalcanal Plains Palm Oil Plantations Limited (GPPOL) took over from the Solomon Islands Plantations Limited (SIPL) in 2005. It was a national project touted as a way to bring back peace, security and economic recovery following five years of 'tensions' from 1998 to 2003. New Britain Palm Oil Limited (NBPOL) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the landowner's association, the Guadalcanal Plains Resource Development Association (GPRDA) that led to the incorporation of an association called the Guadalcanal Plains Resource Development Company Limited (GPRDCL). NBPOL also signed two separate MOUs with the national government and Guadalcanal Province to reopen the oil palm plantation on Guadalcanal in 2005. The establishment of GPRDA and GPRDCL not only provided safeguards and security for landowners but also allowed them to benefit more from their land. GPPOL encouraged the smallholder outgrower scheme (SOGS) on customary land as a way of engaging with farmers planting oil palm on customary land. The establishment of the landowner association and company plus the SOGS provides an 'alternative development' that sees the local Lengo (Guadalcanal Plains) social and cultural relations as pillars and drivers of oil palm development on Guadalcanal. Such a development approach guarantees security for land, safeguards livelihoods, and encourages business growth and wellbeing.

## Overview of Guadalcanal land tenure and social structure

To understand the oil palm industry and the relationships among landowners, the state, and the investor, it is important to have an appreciation of the socio-cultural underpinnings of the Lengo area of Guadalcanal where the oil palm plantation is located. The Lengo area, also known as the Guadalcanal Plains, covers the national constituencies of North and North East Guadalcanal, East Central Guadalcanal and parts of Central Guadalcanal. It is home to five tribal groups, or *kema*: Ghaobata, Lathi, Nekama, Thimbo and Thongo within which there are various landowning *mamata* (clans) which are the custodians of customary land in Lengo. It ensures that people in the community are safe from external threats to engage in livelihood activities on land as long as the activities do not disturb the peace, security and livelihood of others.

Rights over family food gardening areas (*ghatuba*) are highly regarded rights in the Lengo culture as they are sources of security and livelihoods for specific groups of people and families (Nanau, 2017). A *ghatuba* is the gardening place that was first cultivated by people who moved to a new piece of land (Lasaqa, 1972). In the past, when population densities were low, there were vast areas of

unoccupied land and new arrivals were welcomed and allowed to build houses and their sacrificial altars and to communicate with their gods. As they settled in, the hosts normally identified certain areas on their land for the new arrivals to plant their food, fruit trees, and sometimes their homes over which they had rights.

**Security of livelihoods:** These rights are safeguarded by the two ethical requirements of respect (*kukini*) and reverence (*kikinima*). The gardening areas are overseen by those who work on them. As such, fruit trees or wild root crops, building materials, vines, and other materials within and around those areas are out of bounds unless permission is sought from the garden owners (Nanau 2017). Even members of the landowning *mamata* must get permission from those who own gardens to collect anything from there or its surroundings. In order to maintain community and social norms, it is therefore imperative for a developer of land to get the consent of both the *mamata* and those in control of the *ghatuba*. The entire community shares in the good fortunes of the harvest in the gardens or the fruit trees. For instance, with corn, sweet potato, yam or breadfruit harvest, all living in the same community, whether relatives or not, will share the harvest. In the same vein, events and problems that befall a family in the village become everyone's problems and require collective effort and contribution. Security of the individual members of the community and security of lifestyle and food supply are ensured through the spirit of respect and reverence.

An important aspect of daily work in Lengo and much of Guadalcanal is that people do not usually concentrate on a single activity for the entire day but allocate time to food gardening, fishing, church work, school or other meetings. Development activities would do well to take this into consideration.

Solomon Islanders feel safe when their land, resources and livelihood are undertaken within the parameters of their social norms and worldviews. Their interaction with the global economic system through early explorers, labour recruiters, traders, planters, missionaries and colonial administrators left a negative impression on many locals. As a result, Solomon Islanders often view with scepticism any development that involves their customary land.

One way to address this scepticism is to establish development projects that understand and accommodate local customs. Under the NBPOL/GPPOL MOUs, the smallholder out growers scheme operates on customary land. Since the introduction of SOGS, about 2000 hectares of oil palm plantations have been planted on customary land and is likely to increase in the future. The SOGS suit the casual lifestyle of Solomon Islanders who have many other livelihood



activities to attend to in a day. SOGS farmers also benefit more from their own plantations as GPPOL pays them the farm gate price after withholding tax.

**The security of social networks:** Research on the social dimensions of economic activity has demonstrated the importance of social networks in building trust for business success at local, national and international levels (see Amin and Thrift 1995; Yeung 2009; Sidaway 2007). Gibson-Graham (1996), for instance, emphasises that diverse economies bring to attention the non-capitalist practices and relations that are often ignored in mainstream discourses dominated by capitalist market logic. Such non-capitalist practices include relational traditions and reciprocity such as gifting and exchanges (McKay 2009). Those concerned with market logic will consider social embeddedness of economies purely from their capacity to generate income and profit. However, it is also important to recognise that social embeddedness of economies also generates non-economic benefits; those that are less tangible but provide emotional wellbeing and life satisfaction for communities and households. These include scholarships, assistance with church commitments and school activities, construction of water supplies and similar activities.

**The insecurity of past palm oil projects:** Palm oil development on Guadalcanal was part of the colonial government's efforts to develop a plantation economy for the needs of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. As the colonial government prepared the islands for political independence, the government signed agreements with a number of multinational companies to plant oil palm, grow rice, cut timber, and prospect for minerals to reduce dependence on British aid (Larmour 1984:90). Following oil palm trial plantings in 1965, the colonial government successfully reached an agreement with the Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC) in 1970 to establish 8000 acres of land between the Ngalibiu and Mbaraande rivers. The CDC was also to provide SI\$6 million<sup>1</sup> and recruit 800 initial workers to work in the plantation (Moore, 2017). The Solomon Islands Plantations Limited (SIPL) was established in 1971 on an initial 1478 hectares of land between Ngalibiu and Metapono rivers (ibid). It was originally modelled on a nucleus estate linked to smallholder out-growers. However, the smallholder component was never realised and SIPL operated entirely as an estate until its closure in July 1999 during the Guadalcanal conflict (Fraenkel, Allen & Brock 2010).

The oil palm estate was a shareholder arrangement with CDC/SIPL owning 68 per cent of shares, the government 30 per cent, and landowners two per cent (Thompson, Wan et al. 2004: 4). It is very likely that members of landowning *mamata* were new to such negotiations and had very limited information on the worth of such ventures. These agreements benefitted the foreign investors, buyers, and the government with little consideration for landowning *mamata*. The shareholding arrangements were considered by members of landowning *mamata* as 'unfair', but such agreements dictated the operations of SIPL until its closure at the height of the tensions (Nanau 2008: 162).

By 1990, SIPL had acquired a total land area of 6,300 hectares for its oil palm operation. The acquisition of land was conducted under a 'lease and leaseback' arrangement where formerly alienated lands were granted back to original landowning *mamata* with 99-year leases issued to government and 75-year subleases to SIPL/CDC.<sup>2</sup> Rent was paid to landowning *mamata* through their trustees as per provisions of the Land and Titles Act. Furthermore, a total of 58 parcels of customary land were leased to government for 99 years and then subleased to SIPL. Some customary lands were compulsorily acquired by the government for the oil palm development during the early years (Allen 2012a; Fraenkel et al., 2010). Some however, were registered and then sub-leased to the company.<sup>3</sup>

Since the establishment of SIPL in 1971, palm oil has been the country's most valuable agricultural export commodity, employing about 1800 workers with an additional estimated 8–10,000 dependents. Past studies about labour composition in SIPL revealed that 65 per cent of labourers including dependents were from Malaita Province (Fraenkel et al., 2010). During SIPL days, fewer indigenous people from Lengo were engaged in the oil palm industry as manual labourers – an occupation regarded as a low-level job. Frustrations by local residents had stemmed from their inability to control what people, and the island from which they came, were employed on the plantation that was on their land.

Adding to local frustration was the growing conflict that began in 1998 when a group of militant youths from Guadalcanal attacked settlements in Malaita over the government's failure to address important issues such as non-payment of compensation for indigenous people killed by settlers, and restrictions on land ownership in Guadalcanal. Between 1998 and 2000, Lengo, where SIPL (now GPPOL) is located, became the epicentre of the conflict and an estimated 25,000 people were displaced from areas of north Guadalcanal causing the oil palm company to halt operations and subsequently close down in 1999 (Allen 2012b; Fraenkel et al., 2010).

## Security for the future

The closure of SIPL paved the way for increased engagement with landowners and led to a much more favourable shareholding arrangement of 20 per cent equity share compared to only two per cent previously. Priority of employment is now given to landowners of Lengo followed by people from other parts of Guadalcanal. People from other provinces in Solomon Islands are recruited when landowners and others from Guadalcanal can no longer fill remaining positions in the company (Fraenkel et al., 2010) or when the jobs require specialised expertise.

In 1999, leaders of the landowning *mamata*, SIPL, the Solomon Islands Government and Guadalcanal Provincial Government all signed a Memorandum of Understanding providing the framework for engaging nearby communities in contract/manual work, renegotiating the increase in land premiums and rentals leased to SIPL, and dictating that 50 per cent of all revenues generated by government and paid

to Guadalcanal Province be transferred to the trust account of the landowner's association.<sup>4</sup> The MOU also decreed that alienated lands with oil palm trees would be transferred to landowners as compensation for biological diversity loss.

Following international intervention by the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) in 2003 to restore peace in the country, intensive negotiations to resume oil palm production commenced. Discussions occurred between the New Britain Palm Oil Limited (NBPOL), owned by the Malaysian company Kulim, the Solomon Islands Government, the Guadalcanal Provincial Government, and the landowning *mamata* of the five tribal groups of Lengo. Consequently, in 2005, NBPOL commenced operations and started exporting palm oil by mid-2006 (Allen 2012a; Fraenkel et al., 2010). The landowners saw this as an opportunity to improve their livelihoods and negotiated much better terms with the new oil palm company such as signing the NBPOL/GPRDA MOU (Sol-Law 2004a) that allowed them to lease their *mamata* land and enjoy royalties and higher land rentals than previously earned under SIPL. In addition, members of the landowning *mamata* benefit from the SOGS that are now a major feature of the GPPOL.

### Examining the GPPOL development model

National security, land security for landowning *mamata* and *kema*, and investor security were paramount considerations in the discussions that gave way to the establishment of GPPOL. But what made the GPPOL development model attractive to landowners? How does the model encourage community relationships, security and goodwill among stakeholders? Does it respect the rights of *ghatuba* owners who may have lost their livelihood rights because of palm oil development? The answer may lie in the reciprocal nature of relationships that exist between various stakeholders or parties in this development project. To start with, the landowning *mamata* formed an association under the Charitable Trusts Act, called the Guadalcanal Plains Resource Development Association (GPRDA) which then formed the Guadalcanal Plains Resource Development Company Limited (GPRDCL) under the Companies Act.

Three separate MOUs were signed: the first MOU was signed between NBPOL and the Solomon Islands Government; the second was between NBPOL and the Guadalcanal Provincial Government (Sol-Law, 2004b); and the third between NBPOL and GPRDA. As indicated earlier, GPPOL offered better terms of incorporation for landowners. According to the MOU, the GPPOL owns 80 per cent of shares while the landowning *mamata* now own 20 per cent equity share in the company. The Solomon Islands Government does not own shares in GPPOL. The company use arrangements under CDC/SIPL and NBPOL/GPPOL are compared in Table 1.

Before commencing operation, NBPOL/GPPOL ensured that all land leases were standardised with lease expiry dates renewed and extended for 50 years until 2076. Under the NBPOL/GPPOL agreement, rents increased from \$65 per hectare to \$100 per hectare per year. This was paid

quarterly, with \$40 paid in the first quarter and \$20 each in the latter three quarters of each year (ibid). Land rentals for leases are paid to individual lessors who are members of GPRDA.

Table 1. Comparison between the company use arrangement under Commonwealth Development Corporation/Solomon Islands Plantations Ltd and New Britain Palm Oil Ltd/Guadalcanal Plains Palm Oil Plantations Ltd

Criteria	CDC/SIPL	NBPOL/GPPOL
Landowner equity	2 per cent	20 per cent
Rent for land leased to the company	SBD\$65/ha/yr. increased to SBD\$100/ha/yr. in the late 1990s. Company subleased land from government.	SBD\$100/ha/yr. Company leases land directly from landowners
Royalties on production	0 per cent	10 per cent of farm gate price
Employment	Manual labourers mostly from other provinces (65 per cent from Malaita)	Preference to Lengo landowners and Guadalcanal people before others.
Solomon Islands Government Share	30 per cent	0 per cent
Smallholder out-grower scheme	No	Yes

Source: Adapted from Sol-Law, 2004a; Nanau, 2008; Allen 2012a.

There is provision to revalue the land under oil palm after the first seven years of operation and after that every five years (Sol-Law, 2004a). This standardisation process was made possible by the cooperation of the Solomon Islands Government, the Solomon Islands Plantations Ltd, Commissioner of Lands, the Guadalcanal Provincial Government, and the landowning *mamata*. Royalties are calculated on the basis of the farm gate price and are paid into two parts: 50 per cent is payable to landowners monthly and the other 50 per cent is paid in an investment fund. There are also dividends paid annually depending on GPPOL's level of profitability, 20 per cent of which is invested in the landowners' business arm, the GPRDCL, for community projects including construction of water supplies and classrooms, road improvement, provision of scholarships, and related activities.

The GPRDCL currently invests in a refuelling station at Point Cruz in the Honiara CBD, a shop in Ranadi in the Eastern end of Honiara and the Royal Plains Motel at Kola'a Ridge in Honiara, and provides employment for mostly young women and men. In a presentation during the *Guadalcanal Land Summit* held at the Honiara Hotel on 20 March 2018, the then Chair of GPRDA John Rose and his team told the gathering that annual land rental plus royalty for 2018 was SBD\$7.247 million (Rose 2018). Evidence

indicates that this has been a profitable venture with considerable levels of cash going into the local economy since 2013 as a result of the development model used at GPPOL.

## Discussion

GPPOL contributes around 24 per cent to the GDP. While the benefits under the GPPOL development model are notable, there are concerns, especially on the need for more transparency. This is particularly true in terms of land records, agreements and communication channels between GPPOL, GPRDA, *mamata* trustees, and ordinary members of *mamata*. It is evident that the nature of the trusteeship arrangement under the Land and Titles Act is very elitist. In most instances, only *mamata* trustees have access to important information, especially those that relate to land records and transactions. Even some very senior trustees of certain *mamata* do not have access to lease records of their leased lands. For instance, in an interview with a trustee of *na mamata a Pga* (not a real name), he stated:

I have no copy of the Lease Agreements we signed with GPPOL. When we ask [for] them, they did not want to give us copies of these document[s] and claimed that copies are with their lawyers. So till now, I do not have a copy of the lease agreement that we signed (Personal interview, June 6, 2016).

Likewise, a member of *na mamata a Lka* (not a real name), expressed similar sentiments stating,

I have no idea how we as members of *Lka Mamata* are incorporated into GPRDA. That is because there was no wide consultation amongst us. Only our trustees and the elderly people discussed this. We were still small and young when discussions regarding the inclusion of our tribe into GPRDA were convened. We are now adults but still some of us members never see the lease agreements and even agreements that made us part of GPRDA (Personal interview, June 20, 2016).

Lack of information and partial information or misinformation are concerns in the current scheme of things and have future implications for peace and security. In the interest of sustaining cordial relationships, more effort should be made to ensure that communication of information and records between GPPOL, GPRDA, trustees and ordinary members of *kema* and *mamata* are addressed.

Closely related to this but even more serious is the need to closely monitor the process of replacing land trustees who have passed on. It is evident in the list of trustees of different *mamata* parcels listed at the back of the GPRDA and NBPOL MOU (Sol-Law 2004a: 28–42) that many of the land trustees listed there are deceased. Many have not been replaced while others may have been replaced through non-transparent processes contrary to the requirements of replacing trustees under the Land and Titles Act. This has wider security implications as far as the *mamata* members are concerned. With the non-transparent and often times, secretive way deceased land trustees were replaced, the security of *mamata* land and the benefits that come with it may end up in the wrong hands. In the interest of long-term

security and peace the landowning *mamata*, GPRDA, GPPOL, Commissioner of Lands, and the state should initiate a process whereby the replacement of deceased trustees on the current leased lands to GPPOL are done transparently and updated. This could be a model for future development efforts on customary land in the country.

Finally, the potential for the expansion of oil palm plantations into frontier communities is relatively high. Nevertheless, there must also be due consideration for food security when considering expansion. With the high population growth rate and population density in Lengo, consideration must be given to food security. The Guadalcanal Plains are the main source of vegetables and other food supplies for the Honiara markets. The potential to expand into more customary land may have dire consequences on food security and livelihood activities in the future. It is important that GPRDA and the Solomon Islands Government carry out assessments and feasibility studies before allowing further expansion of palm oil into frontier communities as gardening areas for subsistence and other livelihood activities may dwindle giving rise to unforeseen security challenges.

## Conclusion

For development projects like oil palm plantations to succeed in customary land settings and to receive local support, they must be socially embedded in the cultural contexts and worldviews of host communities. Moreover, development projects must realise that relationships are important and must be strengthened through properly discussed agreements. The needs of the wider community ought to be accommodated rather than focussing narrowly on the needs of landowning *mamata*.

In order to ensure future security, peace and sustainable development, enabling land and resource owners to be shareholders in important national projects would benefit the nation. In GPPOL's case, the Solomon Islands Government and Guadalcanal Province allowed the GPRDA and landowning *mamata* to be shareholders in the company rather than mere rent recipients. Dividends and royalty payments received enabled the landowners' business arm, GPRDCL, to invest in livelihood as well as capital projects and businesses. This is a development model that can be replicated in other parts of the Solomon Islands and the wider Pacific if governments are genuinely interested in empowering their citizens and promoting sustainable development.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Aus\$1 = SI\$6.
- <sup>2</sup> Since independence in 1978, all land leases were automatically reduced to a maximum of 75 years.
- <sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive discussion on how customary land is acquired, registered, leased and sub-leased in Solomon Islands, see Larmour (1984: 68–96).
- <sup>4</sup> Even at this stage, one could already see that the willingness of the Solomon Islands Government to give up some of its shares to the landowning *mamata* and provincial government in the interest of national peace and long term security.

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# Climate resilience through sociocultural mobility: Reframing the Pacific's urban informal settlements as critical adaptation pathways

Alexei Trundle<sup>1</sup>, *The University of Melbourne*

The Boe Declaration on Regional Security puts climate change front and centre in the vision of Pacific regionalism set out by Pacific Island Forum leaders, with explicit consideration of and focus on the threat that climate-related shocks and stresses pose to the livelihoods, security, and wellbeing of its inhabitants. Unstated, however, is the risk posed by climate change to the Pacific's cultural and societal fabric – attributes that underpin community-level climate resilience. Also not addressed are the ways in which these sociocultural attributes are intertwined with an established history of movement and migration within, across, and beyond Pacific Island Countries. These omissions have occurred despite being issues of acute geopolitical concern as they sit at the nexus of humanitarian responses to disaster-driven displacement, widespread exertions of state-based control and border securitisation of wealthier nation states, as well as the resurgence of nationalistic political agendas globally. Despite limited efforts to support, engage with, or understand these forms of resilience by development actors and government agencies, these informal attributes are shown to be critical sources of both cultural and community resilience.

This paper draws upon research into community resilience in six migrant communities in two Melanesian capital cities: Port Vila, Vanuatu and Honiara, Solomon Islands.

Emerging evidence of climate-induced migration within Melanesia suggests that the translocation of rurally derived community resilience into Pacific cities can play a critical role in supporting climate adaptation pathways within Pacific Island Countries. This concept fundamentally challenges norms applied in international development, requiring a multifaceted decolonisation of urban systems, processes and regulations. As the impacts of climate change continue to worsen, these social and cultural sources of community resilience need urgent consideration by international development programs and regional planning policy frameworks if stability is to be maintained within and across the Pacific.

## An emergent security concern: climate-induced migration

Climate-induced migration suffers from misaligned scales of analytical and geopolitical interest. The broader narrative of the 'climate refugee' attracts both popular and political attention through speculative concerns associated with mass migration and displacement as prospective threats to security and the control of the state. Analysis and research, however, draw upon empirical evidence relating to the incremental movement and mobility of localised groups who seek proactive or responsive actions to enhance or preserve the security of households and their livelihoods.

Contemporary evidence of the latter is masked by the complexity of attributing both overarching migratory rationales and the climate shocks and stressors embedded within them. Where mass displacement has occurred, climate signals are often obscured by or intertwined with other drivers or pull factors, in addition to specific climate-related shocks stresses. Climate-induced migration can also be exhibited as a response to speculative climate futures, complicating assessments derived solely from recently observed climatological events.

This discursive contestation and complexity parallels critical considerations of the nature of migration itself. Human mobility is a phenomenon that is at its core a 'normal practice interwoven with the everyday' (Barnett and McMichael 2018). It is also at odds with transnational concerns of state-based security and geopolitical stability, leading to a 'territorial trap' that is 'constantly reproduced by populist politics and the media' (ibid). In the case of the Pacific's larger archipelagos these nationalistic narratives can also be observed sub-nationally, with urbanisation and urban identities themselves facing active sociocultural and political resistance (Keen and Connell 2019). The former is evident in recurrent narratives of incentivising the return of young people to depopulated rural areas, while the latter is reflective in the more passive persistence of 'home-island' identities in third and fourth generation urban-born residents of Melanesia (McEvoy, Mitchell and Trundle 2020).

The consideration of climate-induced migration focuses on the attributes of community resilience that can be transferred from rural to urban citizens by migrating individuals and households. These considerations are framed through localised notions of human security, as well as their implications for maintaining national and regional resilience, as reflected in the Boe Declaration and other regional architecture such as the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific.

## Urban resilience and the Pacific migrant dialectic

Mobility and movement have long been central to the resilience of Pacific Islanders. Bertram and Watters, in their initial proposition of the South Pacific 'migration, remittances, aid and bureaucracy' (MIRAB) economic model, argued that within Oceania the:

movement of individuals takes place without severing the links binding them in their kin group of origin ... allowing [them] to colonize and exploit economic opportunities across a wide range of economic environments' (1985:499).

This fluctuating and interconnecting flexibility resonates strongly with theorisations of socioecological resilience. In

Holling's early writings on resilience, it was notable that he identified it to be the determinant 'persistence of *relationships* within a system' [author's emphasis] despite recurrent disturbances or fundamental instability within the ecological system in question (1973:17).

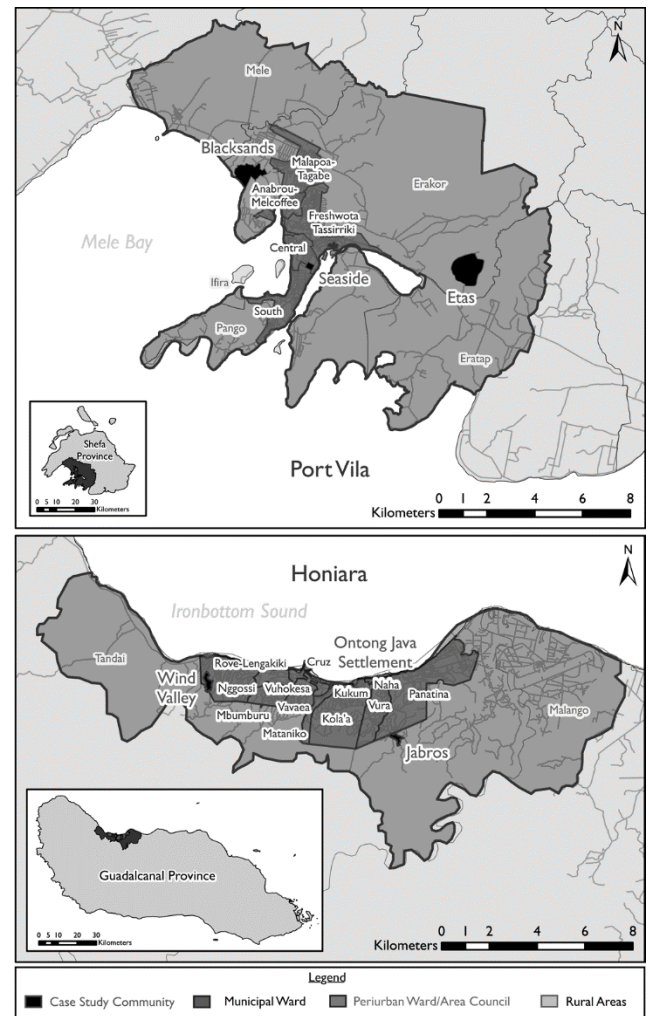
Paradoxically, although urban centres facilitate much of the migratory and fiscal movement referenced by Bertram and Watters, the systems that govern and service the Pacific's cities and towns starkly contrast with this flexibility and resilience. This is despite urbanisation and mobility across most Pacific Island Countries having increased substantially during the intervening three-and-a-half decades during which investments in and development of urban infrastructure and governance has broadly failed to match population growth (Jones 2016). Many colonial-era, municipal boundaries remain unchanged despite peri-urban 'overflow' in cities such as Port Vila and Honiara now comprising between 40–50 per cent of their populations and surrounding local governments lacking the regulatory jurisdiction or bureaucratic infrastructure to provide urban services (Trundle 2020a). Basic infrastructure and services such as potable water, sanitation, solid waste collection, and electricity are also falling well short of demand or even into disrepair (Gero, Kohlitz and Willetts 2017). Equally problematic is the 'orderly' release of urban land for occupation, given the share of urban inhabitants across the region living informally has been estimated at 24.1 per cent in official UN figures without recalculation since 1990 (see, for example, UN-Habitat 2016:86 ).

With limited formal urban governance and a focus of international development efforts in rural areas (Kiddle et al. 2017), the Pacific's urban resilience in the face of recurrent climate-related and other shocks and stresses points to a local, endogenous influence (Trundle, Barth and McEvoy 2019). These hybrid, dialectic forms of urban inhabitation provide alternative capacities to cope with climate-related shocks and stressors beyond those usually evident within urban systems and disaster risk governance. Additionally, they enable adaptation pathways for future climate-induced rural migrants, while at the same time securing key social and cultural assets through their urban translocation.

## Translocating community resilience through informality

The primary data collected as part of this research consisted of semi-structured interviews with informal migrant households across the six settlements shown in Figure 1 (n=57) cross-referenced with interviews with representatives of institutions engaged in climate resilient development activities in each city (n=26). Follow-up workshops were also conducted with each community to explore interview data, with secondary socio-demographic and policy analysis also integrated with these primary research findings. In each context, research was conducted after a major climate-related shock event (the April 2014 Floods in Honiara, and the impact of Tropical Cyclone Pam on Port Vila in March 2015), which provided a point of reference for both community and institutional engagement.

Figure 1: Case study communities in the cities of Port Vila, Vanuatu and Honiara, Solomon Islands



Source: Author.

When asked about sources of security support received in response to a climate-related shock or stress, respondents across all six communities demonstrated that formal government support played only a secondary role at a community level. Two-thirds of all households responded negatively, noting that 'place here, *hemi olsem* the government no look' (BSHH5), or that 'if you *votem* for him *lo* lose, [the politician who lost], *em* winner him no help you [the winning MP won't help you]' (WVHH7). Of those responses that viewed government engagement in the community positively, awareness raising activities or ad hoc infrastructure interventions that had limited effects on household-level security or long-term development pathways were viewed as most beneficial. As one respondent noted:

after Cyclone Pam, [we] received tanks, ropes, food, tarpaulin, water. But the things we really want [from] the government ... is a good road for when it is rainy, water supply and light (ETHH7).

In contrast, resilience within these areas was recognised by community-members and institutional representatives alike as being drawn from informal community structures and hybridised, translocated traditional knowledge and *kastom*. As one institutional representative in Vanuatu noted:

the chief works very closely with the council [and] island associations. So those island associations provided security ... I think we [need to] start praising those local systems and see how we can integrate or ... put them together (VUE7).

Another reflected that when Tropical Cyclone Pam hit Port Vila there were:

all those impacts on some modern infrastructure, housing [but] some more traditional housing was very much intact ... we need to relook at how we package some of those initiatives or deliverables that we label in terms of resilience (VUE2).

When discussing the urban features, functions and actors that supported resilience at a household level, community respondents referenced informal, community attributes such as chiefs, customary practices, and the *wantok* system twice as often (n=849) as those associated with the state (n=323) and civil society (n=98) combined. Critically, these attributes reflected translocated traditional, rural practice, often combined with urban resources, economies and the interplay between differing cultural backgrounds. As one institutional respondent reflected, 'people that migrate to the urban ... they come with all this traditional know-how, all these rich techniques and information on how to survive through a natural disaster, be it flooding, a cyclone, whatever. But ... access to that material, or the equivalent of that material in the modern [context] is their big dilemma' (VUE12).

Food security was also found to hinge on a vast network of predominantly informal food production systems, driven similarly by informal land tenure, markets and labour. 'Gardens' accounted for 17.3 per cent (n=155) of all references to informal community-level activities across the 57 household interviews. Despite encompassing a variety of tenure types and garden typologies (ranging from backyard *sup sup* gardens to small scale agriculture in peri-urban 'bush garden' areas), these sources of food production and informal income operated almost exclusively outside of the recognised functional purposes of both of the two cities irrespective of their municipal or peri-urban classification. Of the households interviewed, 68.4 per cent had a garden, however access to arable land varied depending upon the proximity of settlement areas to the town boundary and relationships with customary land owner groups, consistent with findings in other studies (Komugabe-Dixon et al., 2019; Savage, Bambrick and Gallegos 2020).

Land tenure was found to have a more complex relationship with community resilience and household security, reflective of the diversity of occupation arrangements evident within even the six settlements in question, with informality noted to persist elsewhere in each city (McEvoy, Mitchell and Trundle 2020). Nonetheless, the capacity to establish either informal extended family clusters within formal allotments or to expand upon existing informal housing footprints in unleased areas was found to generate both critical forms of local resilience, and to enable a greater level of mobility to and from each city in support of responses to external and localised shock and stress effects. The sharing of informal urban services (such as potable water sources, sanitation and washing facilities)

across households showed potential for scaling up and extending government and development led interventions to enhance security. However, this would require informal governance structures to be better integrated with these formal institutions.

The lack of understanding of these endogenous sources of climate resilience presented a critical security risk. The continuing pressure of urban expansion on peri-urban areas was observed to be a major 'non-climate' pressure that was impacting the food security and household income and productivity of many informal inhabitants, with some households noting that they had to walk hours to either access arable land or collect water. The lack of formal frameworks for engagement between peri-urban expansion of informal settlements, the government, and customary landowners is also widely recognised as being a critical contributing factor to the Ethnic Tension in Solomon Islands, providing a cautionary historical demonstration of the potential impact of a lack of engagement with these informal structures (Foukona 2015).

### **There is no 'Pacific B': Climate security without urban adaptation pathways?**

Barnett and McMichael set out two key considerations of climate induced migration: the process of cumulative causation; and the diversity of spatial and temporal scales that differentiate mobility from migration (2018). In the case of migration to Pacific cities, informal settlements play a critical integration role that would otherwise be inhibited by the formal constructs of cities. Through analysis of these characteristics and functional arrangements, lessons can be learnt to enable future adaptation pathways as the impacts of climate change accelerate across the region.

The capacity for informal settlements to respond to cumulative pressures is enhanced by *wantok* networks, which enable ongoing rural-urban linkages. As one respondent explained of one of the earliest such settlements in Honiara:

The first person to settle here is a fisherman ... in the beginning there were only men who came to settle here. As time goes on, the fisherman go back home, they get married, then they bring their spouse here to live. [More] people migrate into Honiara ... to farm, some came to school, some to live with those who already live here. So the village has grown from there, and expanded (OJHH1).

Equally, maintaining island ties enables movement back to home islands in response to crises within the urban domain – a process that is intertwined with circular patterns of movement that maintain and facilitate these inter-island kinship systems.

More complicated, however, are questions relating to the scale and irreversible nature of population shifts necessitated by the impacts of climate change. This is particularly the case as related to slow-onset stresses such as sea-level rise, ocean acidification, saline ingress and shifts to growing seasons for crops and livelihood products. While the Pacific is often cited in reference to its vulnerability to climate



change impacts, its diversity of geographies, livelihood arrangements, and even localised climatological and geological impacts means that the climate ‘signal’ is often unclear.

Although many interviewed households identified searching for employment as the primary reason for migrating to the city a more detailed interrogation uncovered critical secondary pull factors instigated by state policies. More than half of the households (33 of 57), identified needing to pay school fees as the underlying rationale for their shift into the city in search of employment. Respondents also noted that once school payments were no longer required they intended to return to the islands. As one representative from the community of Blacksands, Port Vila explained:

*Bai mi stap here, Twofela boy blo me secondary [school], so mi stap lo completem school. Suppose mi go back to Tanna, mi work where? So mi must stap here so many years, until they completem school, then mi go back’ (BSHH6).*

A further five households had migrated to the city for study directly.

Climate-related drivers of urban in-migration were less uniformly evident across the case study communities. However, in Honiara’s, Ontong Java Settlement, there was a clear demonstration of climate-induced migration with the community’s home island Ontong Java Atoll experiencing severe coastal erosion, incremental sea level rise, and saline ingress into water supplies. Even in this instance, climate-induced migration was noted to be intertwined with other factors. As one community leader explained during work-shop consultations:

with migration ... people are experiencing problems with food security, because the gardens are being affected by sea water encroaching into the freshwater lens. [So] people come over seeking medical attention amongst other things and don’t go back (Ontong Java Settlement Workshop Respondent, November 2019).

Limits to these endogenous, community-based forms of resilience highlighted a need for government, donor and/or civil society partnership and support. While circular patterns of migration enable urban adaptation pathways, this heightened mobility can also obscure adaptation planning which needs to be led by government and other actors. In the case of Ontong Java atoll, this was already happening, with one interview respondent noting that ‘land where we can resettle lo Malaita [island], government and the church are looking for, working for *mifala relocatem* (OJHH2).

## Conclusion

The sociocultural resilience of Pacific Island communities, often classified as one of the world’s most climate and natural disaster exposed regions, has long been lauded as one of its greatest strengths. Limits to mobility across and within the Sea of Islands are increasingly becoming evident as the onset of climate-related shocks and stresses forces communities and ecosystems to relocate and adapt. By focusing on the community attributes that underpin this

resilience rather than simply individuals or households, policymakers can better understand how to support the ‘positive’ translocation of these sociocultural attributes into new settings.

Informal settlements in the Pacific have been both understudied and broadly left to emerge without formal government or civil intervention, and as such have endogenously adapted traditional governance structures and customs with relatively high levels of tenure security in many Pacific Island Countries. These Pacific ‘urban villages’, while lacking in government services and infrastructure, contain attributes that would benefit from support from within urban systems, and from being more widely encouraged within the formal domain. In doing so, a greater breadth of urban adaptation pathways can be both identified and established, enhancing the security of both the community and the state in the face of the impacts of climate change.

## Notes

- 1 Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute/Connected Cities Lab.

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## Reconfiguring human security relations between the state and society: The Papua New Guinea experience

*Henry Ivarature, The Australian National University*

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has profoundly reconfigured human security relations between state and society in Papua New Guinea (PNG). In implementing its COVID-19 response, PNG opted for an authoritarian structure with an emphasis on law enforcement where transparency, accountability, and democracy were legally qualified to protect human health in the interest of national security.

In taking this approach, the perceived human security threat posed by COVID-19 led to a significant change in relations between state and society. The state has requested that citizens momentarily forgo democratic rights, liberties, and freedoms in the interest of national security, but sustaining society's long-term participation, cooperation and compliance has been a challenge on a number of fronts.

PNG society in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic is considered strong in the sense that most citizens do not comply or readily cooperate with the COVID-19 measures and regulations issued by the state. This non-cooperative behavior exposes the weaknesses in the capability of state agencies to enforce COVID-19 measures and regulations. Inadequate funding of COVID-19 initiatives as well as an under-resourced public health infrastructure considered inadequate in handling the pandemic also played on relations between the state and society.

### COVID-19: Reconfiguration of state and society relations

On March 11, when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a health pandemic PNG's response to protect its society comprised five key measures rolled out over four months from March to June 2020.

1. The first was the declaration on 14 March of COVID-19 as a quarantinable epidemic and infectious disease. The action taken was to restrict international flights to Port Moresby, and restrict international arrival of ships to three ports in the country; Port Moresby, Kokopo and Madang. A total ban was placed on travelers arriving or transiting through virus infected countries.
2. The second measure was the declaration by the National Security Council on 16 March of COVID-19 as a national security threat. A ban on international all travel was imposed on 20 March. PNG closed its borders, except for health workers, persons assisting with COVID-19 response, diplomats, military personnel, and flight crew and crews of international ships. Throughout the country, social clubs, sporting events and gatherings of over 100 persons were also banned.
3. The third measure was the declaration of a nation-wide state of emergency (SoE) on 23 March by the National Executive Council under section 239 of the Constitution. The SoE lasted for 14 days. At this point, PNG had one case of COVID-19. Initially, an inter-agency National Operations Centre<sup>1</sup> was established to oversee and coordinate the SoE. Subsequently, a National COVID-19 Control Centre (NCCC) assumed daily operational and implementation matters. A Ministerial Committee headed by the Minister for Health had political oversight. Its members included the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Communications and Technology, Civil Aviation, Citizenship and Border Security, State Enterprises, and Transport.

Under the SoE, the military was called-out to protect the liquified natural gas project sites; maintain law and order in Hela, Southern Highlands, Morobe, Central provinces and the National Capital District. They also patrolled the main corridors of the Highlands Highway and the border provinces of West Sepik and the Western provinces, aside from helping civilian authorities in humanitarian relief exercises (PNG National Gazette No. G185 2020).

Overseeing their operations and implementing COVID-19 measures was the new police commissioner, David Manning. He was appointed on 26 March. Manning had been on the post for five months when he was entrusted with containing the spread of COVID-19. As Emergency Controller he had control over police, army and correctional services who were assigned to support his operations. He also had responsibility over a budget of PGK45 million plus additional funding that was allocated to dealing with COVID-19. In the 22 provinces of PNG, the Emergency Controller was supported by his provincial police commanders, provincial administrators and chief executives of provincial health authorities. With this coordinating structure, power was entrusted in an individual with authority and control over human behavior, movement, and freedoms of the people in PNG.

4. The fourth measure was to extend the nation-wide SOE for two months from 2 April to 2 June. It came into effect after the 14-day nation-wide SoE ended on 2 April. In obtaining parliament's unanimous approval to extend the SoE, Prime Minister James Marape said this measure was necessary 'to protect all citizens' (Marape 2000). Four extraordinary emergency laws were also unanimously passed to support the implementation of SoE. These laws were:

- the *Quarantine (Amendment) Act 2020*;
- the *Emergency (Defence Force) (COVID-19) Act 2020*;
- the *Public Health (Amendment) Act 2020*; and,
- the *Emergency (General Provisions) (COVID-19) Act 2020*.

In passing these laws, society, through its representatives in parliament, agreed to temporarily forfeit a number of democratic rights, freedoms and liberties in the interest of national security. COVID-19 more or less had reconfigured state and society relations. The public became aware of these limitations as security personnel enforced regulations and restricted movement of people.

5. The final and fifth measure was the enactment of the *Public Health Emergency Act 2020* also known as the pandemic law in June 2020. When the 2-months nation-wide SoE ended on 2 June, parliament purposely extended the SoE for an additional 14-days for this law to be prepared and tabled in parliament. This law provides the legal framework for 'a practical and effective legislative mechanism for the implementation of all necessary measures to detect, prevent the entry of, and eradicate[the]... pandemic, outbreak or serious public health threats' (Ivarature, 2020a). It covers COVID-19 as well as other future pandemics. Other changes include the establishment of the National Control Centre (NCC) which replaced the COVID-19 NCCC. An operational blue print forms the framework of the NCC, aligning it with the pandemic law and *Niupela Pasin* or the new normal. The changes are expected to streamline coordination between provincial coordination centres and relevant agencies to implement the COVID-19 response. At this point in time, there were eight COVID-19 cases in five provinces, including the capital.

The absence of a vaccine to deal with COVID-19 dramatically reshaped global economics and challenged the medical capabilities of many countries. In PNG, the

staggering surge in global cases and its spread around the world was used to reinforce and justify anxiety and fear in view of the country's inadequate health infrastructure. The underlying measures taken between March and June 2020 were, and continue to be, underpinned by a defensive strategy of contact tracing, communication and awareness, and infection containment, until vaccines are rolled out.

PNG's poor financial and economic outlook posed a serious challenge for government in protecting its people (Ling-Stucky 2020a). In April 2020 when the two-month nation-wide SoE was agreed to by parliament, the country had a budget deficit of PGK4.6 billion which was forecast to grow to PGK6.6 billion (Ling-Stucky 2020a). The cause of the debt was attributed to a PGK2 billion decline in external and domestic revenues, forcing the government to closely manage its implementation of COVID-19 programs and other public expenditures. PNG's GDP was also projected to fall in 2020 'by 3.7 per cent, a drop from a positive 2 per cent to a negative 1.7 per cent' (Ling-Stucky 2020b).

Despite the poor financial position, the Prime Minister promised to release PGK45 million for the COVID-19 response allocated in the 2020 national budget. He also promised an additional PGK150 million; an economic stimulus plan of PGK5.6 billion which was later increased to PGK5.7 billion to minimise the economic impact of COVID-19; and a supplementary budget that reflected the evolving economic environment.

Altogether, a total of PGK715 million in different lots was committed to COVID-19, excluding other international assistance. This amount comprised the PGK45 million committed in the 2020 national budget, PGK70 million from the World Bank and PGK600 million by the government under the stimulus package.

The allocation of PGK600 million was split between health and security (PGK280 million) and economic stimulation programs (PGK320 million). Of the PGK280 million for the health and security sector, 45 per cent was allocated to health, 48 per cent went to security, and five per cent went to fund a citizen repatriation exercise. The remainder went to churches for an urban food assistance program. Under health, funding went to preventative actions, pay frontline provincial health workers, and purchase personal protection equipment. This budget commitment excludes the substantial financial and resource assistance from international organisations and donors. Security sector funding was for surveillance and monitoring borders and the construction of ten border posts along the PNG-Indonesia border where the threat from the virus is considered a high risk (Ivarature 2020b).

## Society checks on state COVID-19 response

The danger of investing extraordinary emergency powers in a single individual is the potential for abuse of those powers. Fortunately, the Emergency Controller has acted responsibly.

Oversight on behalf of society requires strong parliamentary opposition to keep government in check; truly

bipartisan parliamentary activities; and a fearlessly inquisitive media to ensure transparency and accountability on the expenditure of public funds, use of state resources, and quality of implementation of regulations. Through social media, the public sought and obtained public accountability of the COVID-19 budget allocation. The government also responded positively to these demands. It was kept accountable by the small vocal opposition which at that time numbered only five parliamentarians.

## **Resource limitations shape State efforts to protect society**

Private sector businesses and employees have been the most affected by COVID-19. Many businesses have scaled-down operations and laid off employees. On the other hand, state agency employees had guaranteed security in income and employment – a point of contention for the PNG Trade Union Congress (PNGTUC) that accused the government of unfair treatment and discrimination.

The PNGTUC claimed that some 10,000 private sector employees have had to fend for themselves after being laid off. In April, the Prime Minister assured the public that business super funds agreed to provide relief by allowing withdrawals of between 30–50 per cent of their contributions. In the May economic stimulus plan of PGK5.6 billion, a total of PGK500 million was allocated to help people who had lost their jobs as a direct result of COVID-19. But withdrawal of contributions could not proceed without amending the *General Superannuation Fund Act*. As the Act only allows withdrawals after a waiting period of three months, section 90 needed to be amended for immediate withdrawals. Government did not keep its promise to amend the Act in June. The Act was amended in September and certified in November. By then, most people who were made redundant because of COVID-19 satisfied the minimum 3 months.

Employees affected by COVID-19 were assured that commercial banks would provide relief on loan repayments, such as a three-month grace period. Small and medium enterprises were forced to wait for the economic stimulus plan. The initial amount promised in April was PGK250 million but in September, only PGK200 million was released for SMEs.

## **Testing trust between state and society over COVID-19**

Appealing to society to cooperate and comply with COVID-19 preventative measures in the national interest necessitates reciprocal behaviour from the state and its agents. Trust is central in this relationship, but a number of actions by the state undermine society's trust.

The first is corruption. Society expected the state to financially account for the use of public funds and demanded an audit of the PGK45 million when allegations of misuse surfaced in the media. With the history of corruption in the health sector over procurement of medicine and medical supplies still fresh in the public's mind, society led by civil society and the media held government

accountable. Although legal exemption of COVID-19 funds from the public finance management and procurement laws raised suspicion and distrust, the government is committed to accountability. Even the requirement for the Emergency Controller to only provide an expenditure report to the Cabinet added to society's distrust.

The second is the dissemination of concise, accurate information to keep society informed. Convening daily media conferences to update on the progress of COVID-19 management became a standard operating practice for the Emergency Controller and the Prime Minister. However, the majority of the rural population was kept in the dark as the updates were received by a small section of society with access to modern media platforms. Locals also distrusted the integrity of tests in light of the high incidence of cases being reported positive and subsequently found to be negative.

The third is the occasional strong-handed tactics of law enforcement by some security personnel when regulating public behaviour. Citizens were unhappy as mistreatment and abuses escalated, and food, including betel-nut, was seized and destroyed. As society's complaints intensified, the Opposition began to question government's approach in managing COVID-19. In its view, COVID-19 was a public health issue, and not a law and order problem. The appointment of a policeman as Emergency Controller and the hurriedly enacted pandemic law reinforced the belief that the pandemic had been securitised. By enacting this law, rights and liberties, including democracy, have been debased. It is not surprising that the constitutionality of this law which was rushed through without wide public consultation is now before the courts to determine. An appropriate framework would be public health-based, led by medical professionals where political leadership is directly accountable and responsible.

Finally, society expects equal treatment and application in laws, rules and regulations. Everyone, regardless of office, is expected to comply with COVID-19 laws and regulation. No one should be exempted given the serious public health risk COVID-19 poses to society. The government's decision to allow a private jet carrying a wealthy Chinese businessman to enter and depart PNG in June against pandemic law and COVID-19 protocols, greatly disappointed society. That disappointment was expressed in a letter published in the *Post-Courier* on 18 August 2020.

Our only hope through this challenging time is that our leaders should set the example for our people to follow ... If we are being asked to stay at home, why would our Prime Minister and other Ministers choose to travel out of the COVID-19 hotspot in PNG that is supposed to be in lockdown and drive the length of the country taking selfies and posting on Facebook ... If people need to wear masks, and they do, then why are Ministers openly interacting without masks. The Mining Minister walking into shopping centres without a mask despite being asked to wear one ... Our people will follow the lead set by our leaders.

## **Conclusion**

The key lesson for PNG is to undertake a long-term investment in a sustainable public health infrastructure if it is to

guarantee adequate protection against health security threats. Such an approach would complement the defensive strategies taken to prevent the outbreak and spread of highly contagious and infectious disease.

PNG must develop and invest in a pragmatic pandemic management strategy that addresses all health needs, not just those of the pandemic. This strategy must be based on public health management practices and be led by qualified medical professionals. Law enforcement, while important in maintaining public order, should not handle a public health problem.

Society does not necessarily need to give up their rights, freedoms and liberties. The risks for abuse of powers are high. Society may be more willing to cooperate in preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus if their rights, freedoms and liberties are not abused. People may be more compliant with COVID-19 regulations if public funds are subjected to public finance and public procurement laws. Society may participate if agents of state also practice and apply the same rules and regulations they make. In this difficult economic climate, investments in human security, particularly in health and economic recovery, are two priority areas for building relations between state and society.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> It comprised of the Departments of Health, Treasury, Finance, Citizen and Immigration Authority, Transport and Infrastructure, Information and Technology, National Airport Corporation, Air Niugini, PNG Ports, National Agriculture and Quarantine Authority, PNG Customs Services, PNG Tourism Promotion Authority, PNG Defence Force, Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary and the Institute of Medical Research.

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# Human security in the Pacific: A personal reflection

*Vijay Naidu, University of the South Pacific*

Human security is defined as a holistic approach in dealing with the whole range of threats that affect individuals and communities. In this sense it means achieving freedom from want and freedom from fear. Freedom from want is mainly achieved through employment and meaningful livelihoods and can exist when people are able to meet all their basic needs including food and shelter as well as access education, health and social security services provisioned by the state. Freedom from fear means that they are protected from crime and violence, intrusive and predatory actions of the state, and are able to participate in decision-making bodies and freely choose representatives to those bodies. Human security therefore encapsulates the elimination of poverty and the empowerment of people to demand and take pro-active measures to keep their communities safe.

Pacific island communities have survived and sustained themselves over several millennia by giving due regard to the multiple dimensions of what is being conceptualised as 'human security'. With the integration into the world economy brought about by colonialism and more recently, globalisation, the challenges to human security have significantly increased and become more complex. There are many internal and external threats to human security and external factors can generate internal changes that may have significant consequences for a Pacific Island country (PIC).

## Security threats in PICs

Conflicts in a number of island states has arisen over the use of local resources for 'national development' in a less than transparent and equitable manner; the presence of strangers in territories claimed by resident indigenous groups; competition over land and jobs; the destruction of natural habitats for subsistence livelihoods; the lack of participation by local communities in making decisions about the use of their resources; and the use of repressive measures by state power holders against those who protested their legitimate concerns. Most PICs are variously subject to a full range of natural hazards such as cyclones, droughts, flooding and tidal surges, earthquakes, and tsunamis as well as volcanic activity. Three different vulnerability indexes show that PICs and other small island states are amongst the top 30 of the most vulnerable of 111 countries. 'Vanuatu is ranked the most vulnerable of any of the 111 states; Tonga is third, Fiji eighth, the Solomon Islands eleventh, Samoa twentieth, Papua New Guinea thirtieth, and Kiribati fifty ninth....' (Brindley 2004:23).

**Economic insecurity:** As very small and non-competitive producers of raw materials, PICs are extremely vulnerable to fluctuations in commodity prices. Most are heavily dependent on one or two commodities. They are price takers rather than price makers and producers of much that they do not consume and consumers of much that they do not

produce. Human capital loss is a major concern for some countries.

For much of the last two decades PICs have experienced stagnating and even periodically declining rates of economic growth, although on per capita terms, a number of countries and the region as a whole have received very large amounts of development assistance.

Despite the size of these aid flows, real per capita growth rates over the period have been disappointing. The average for the Pacific over the 20 year period to 2001 was 0.8 per cent per annum, compared to 1.1 per cent for the rest of the world. The last decade has been even worse, with the Pacific averaging a contraction of 0.1 per year, compared to the world average of 1.4 per cent growth (Brindley, 2004:4).<sup>1</sup>

Agriculture, most especially subsistence agriculture, is regarded as posing a considerable impediment to economic growth. In virtually all PICs, customary forms of land tenure are intimately bound up with small-holder production. Customary land tenure is perceived as a major block to increased productivity as group ownership does not allow land to be used as collateral in securing bank loans for investment in equipment, fertiliser and pesticides. Moreover, investments in other areas such as tourism, housing, renewable energy, and waste disposal are seen as being unnecessarily stalled by land not being a factor of production that can be bought and sold in the market. However, it is also widely recognised that without the access that most islanders have to plots of cultivable land guaranteed by their membership of land-owning groups, poverty levels would be much higher.<sup>2</sup>

**Natural and man-made insecurities:** In addition to economic vulnerability and natural hazards, 'man made' disasters abound. These include lack of accountability by state power holders, serious shortcomings in the rule of law, public finance mismanagement, outright corruption and military intervention in democratic processes. In a number of the largest countries, security forces have become the primary sources of insecurity.<sup>3</sup> Poor leadership and lack of vision and appropriate public policies together with the processes of peripheral capitalism have led to growing social inequality and poverty. In the larger PICs, significant numbers of children do not attend schools due to a lack of affordability and accessibility. The lack of opportunities for gainful employment and amenities for recreational activities have spawned counter cultures of delinquency, crime and drug abuse amongst unemployed young men and women. Sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS have become widespread. In addition to the existing pandemic of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in PICs, COVID-19 is now affecting people in numerous ways. Tourism and remittance dependent PICs have been seriously impacted by near complete curtailment of international flights, the

abrupt end to tourism and the loss of employment for thousands of workers engaged in tourism and related sectors. Fortunately, PICs' governments acted quickly to close their borders, limiting the spread of the virus.

**Human insecurity:** Another extremely negative social phenomenon has arisen as the result of the COVID-19 lockdowns and loss of employment and livelihoods: domestic violence and violence against women and children, already widespread in the region, has increased significantly. Numerous cases of battered women and the violent deaths of women at the hands of intimate partners have been reported in Fiji and PNG. Violence has also been prevalent historically, and lurks below the surface in disputes over land, inter-tribal competition, family disputes, and even in sports. These can be fuelled by alcohol and other drugs. In PNG, Bougainville and the Solomon Islands, weapons, including guns, have aggravated injuries and mortalities in conflicts between groups and idle young men have provided the foot soldiers for unscrupulous leaders in their bid for political ascendancy in Fiji, PNG, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands.

**Environmental insecurity:** Global warming continues to have a disproportionate effect on atoll states such as Kiribati, the Marshall Islands and Tuvalu where saltwater intrusion is increasing – the partial consequences of activities in the industrialised world. Climate change has had consequences for all island countries further reducing the ability of their populations to literally keep their heads above water. Extreme weather events such as Cyclone Winston, Cyclone Pam, Cyclone Gita, and Cyclone Harold have devastated a number of PICs. Fiji experienced an economic downturn of 20 per cent of GDP after Cyclone Winston in 2016. The estimated damage caused by Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu a year earlier was equivalent to 64 per cent of its GDP. Nearly 38 per cent of Tonga's GDP was lost as a result of Cyclone Gita in 2018. In the midst of the emerging threats posed by COVID-19, in April 2020, Tropical Cyclone Harold destroyed agricultural livelihoods, homes and infrastructure estimated at 65 per cent of Vanuatu's GDP. Cyclone Harold also caused serious destruction in Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Fiji. Development advances and improved living standards are destroyed by these extreme weather events, and affected PICs have to start from scratch, again and again.

These natural, socio-cultural, economic and political problems and hazards comprise the security threats that can, and do, affect human development and human security in PICs. To combat these threats the 'human security framework', which is an integrated approach based on partnerships between civil society organisations, states, and regional/international institutions, is intended to provide a comprehensive safeguard that seeks to empower local peoples.

## From State security to human security

This new partnership approach to human security is a significant paradigm shift from the state-centric model of security that has emerged over the last few decades. In this approach, security was defined narrowly as threats to the

survival of the state. These threats were perceived as being mainly external and included cross-border issues, possible military invasion, fish poaching in territorial waters, drugs and human trafficking. Since 9/11 there has been a pre-occupation with terrorism, heightened securitisation of the state, and international aid donors refocusing aid towards military and police assistance.

Political instability was considered a significant internal threat to the state, leading to harsh crackdowns on advocates of human rights and social justice. The human security paradigm sees security much more broadly as the survival and safety of people and their communities.

Human security is concerned with safeguarding and expanding people's vital freedoms. It requires both shielding people from acute threats and empowering them to make changes of their own lives. Needed are integrated policies that focus on people's survival, livelihood and dignity, during downturns as well as prosperity (UN Commission on Human Security, 2003:iv).

The Pacific Plan (2005) accepted this broader notion of security as 'the stable and safe social (or human) and political conditions necessary for, and reflective of, good governance and sustainable development...' The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) compiled two security frameworks within its regional integration program to address Pacific leaders' vision of 'a region of peace, harmony, security, social inclusion and prosperity to allow our people to lead free, healthy and productive lives' (Pacific Islands Forum 2016).

While the Security Sector Governance Framework focused primarily on state institutions, all security institutions have the responsibility to support human rights. In the global context this is recognised through the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Providers, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the Montreux Document. The Secretariat developed the UN Human Security Framework (2016) to provide a clear common foundation and strategic guidance to Forum Island Countries and stakeholders for improving the understanding, planning and implementation of human security approaches in stand-alone and broader peace, security and development initiatives for the region.

The Human Security Framework provides a common language and sound basis for discussions, planning and implementation of human security initiatives. It is also a tool for communicating to partners and governments inside and outside the region as to what the common understanding of human security is by Forum member countries (Deputy Secretary General, PIFS Andie Fong Toy, 2016).<sup>4</sup>

## The Human Security Framework

**Civil society organisations:** The human security framework recognises that human security requires an integrated approach that brings together civil society and the state. CSOs comprise the more traditional community and faith-based entities, NGOs, business groups, trade unions, ethnic and cultural associations. Their role in social, economic, political, and environmental spheres cannot be over-estimated. CSOs are involved in food security and

livelihood related activities, they provide education, health and social services as well as seek sustainable development. They settle disputes, mediate and resolve conflict and contribute positively to peace building. The work of civil society groups enhances social capital.

When men, women and children are more informed about all aspects of human security, their rights and responsibilities and their entitlements as citizens, they are likely as individuals and as members of CSOs to take initiatives to protect themselves from threats and make informed choices regarding their human security. They are better able to hold leaders at all levels to account on their security. CSOs are well placed to mobilise people and resources to enhance safety and security. This has been evident in PICs as individuals, youth groups, women's movements, community, and faith-based organisations together with international NGOs and partners have mobilised to support people affected by COVID-19.

In summary therefore, CSOs can play vital roles in generating, promoting, maintaining and taking action on information and action programs to enhance human security by themselves and as a valued partner of state institutions and development agencies. It is imperative that Forum island governments individually and collectively recognise the role that CSOs have played in protecting and promoting Pacific communities from security threats. This recognition should be accompanied by a willingness to engage in dialogue with CSO representatives in an equitable and open manner. CSOs must be accepted as partners in the work of governments and at the regional level CSO representatives should be effectively represented when decisions are made about human security matters. They need to be involved in the implementation, assessment, and monitoring of projects and programs relating to improving the security of people and communities.

**Governance:** The Biketawa Declaration committed Forum Islands governments to good governance defined as being open and transparent, protecting the rights of citizens as well as upholding democratic processes and institutions. These guiding principles provide the bases for the formulation and implementation of public policies that are responsive to the needs of citizens and are equitable. Institutions that effectively provide public goods, promote rule of law and expand physical infrastructure in an open, accountable and inclusive way promote the environment for human development, respect for human rights and increase the capacity of all to actively pursue human security goals.

**Reconciliation and peacebuilding:** To some extent tension and conflicts are part of human existence and there are routine and established modes of channeling and resolving these stresses in societies. In recent times however, there have been overt and violent conflicts that have unraveled the social fabric of communities. Post-conflict peacebuilding can easily be jeopardised without attendance to the root causes of the conflict, and building confidence and trust within and between individuals and groups involved. The process of reconciliation requires active participation of CSOs, especially recognising and

supporting the role of women as peace-makers. There are several steps in the reconciliation process: first, the preparedness of the parties involved in the conflict to accept their part in generating and aggravating the antagonism. Second, there must be a willingness to make reparations for the harm done to others. Third, being prepared to dialogue honestly on how to deal with the root causes of the conflict. Fourth, being prepared to participate in peace building activities that bring together the former conflicting groups.

**Law and justice systems:** Legal and justice systems in the PICs involve both indigenous institutions and the colonially inherited 'western system'. Many rural and remote communities as well as urban informal settlements continue to use values and norms that reflect customary systems. There is an emphasis on 'restorative justice' and rebuilding relationships between the aggrieved person's family/community and those of the offenders. The arrangements are better understood, more easily accessible and are generally not overly expensive. The exception to this observation is the huge inflation in compensation payments required in the Southern Highlands Province of PNG. Additionally, the resolution of certain types of crime such as rape in the customary system may not be adequate as a satisfactory remedy for victims. However, the growing number of crimes, increasing numbers in prison and the heightened sense of insecurity in urban areas provide evidence that the existing 'western' system is not working. There are issues of whether the punishment fits the crime, especially for first offenders, the treatment of juvenile delinquents, the rehabilitation of prisoners, support for their families, support for the victims of crime, and recidivism.

**Society and cultures:** In recent decades there have been significant social transformation of kinship in small communities, but traditional values and institutions have continued to exist. In several instances, significantly valued cultural institutions are recognised in PICs' constitutions. Customary ownership of land and its inalienability are entrenched in a number of constitutions as is the role of chiefs and persons of rank. The Biketawa Declaration recognises 'the importance of respecting and protecting indigenous rights and cultural values, traditions and customs.' Additionally, there is a need to ensure that languages of communities are taught to its younger members as this is most likely path to maintaining the integrity of Pacific island cultures. There is a danger, however, that the wholesale acceptance of traditional rights, values, traditions and customs will have negative impacts on women, youth and children. The latter tend not to have much say in traditional decision-making fora. Besides, there are likely to be serious violations of human rights if 'customary' sanctions against non-conforming members of society are enforced.

**Livelihoods and poverty:** A fundamental challenge for PICs will be to ensure meaningful livelihoods and employment for their people. Increasing social inequality has been accompanied by a growing number of people, especially young persons, without jobs or access to other livelihoods. Rural-urban disparities have grown, and ever larger



numbers are eking a living below the poverty line. An Asian Development Bank study on poverty and hardship in the region confirmed what CSO representatives had been saying about the extent of poverty in PICs. Cook Islands had 12 per cent of its people living below the poverty line; all the Melanesian countries had poverty level ranging from 30 to 40 per cent; and in Kiribati half the population were found to live in poverty. Gross social inequality and poverty often lead to social exclusion, unrest and political instability. The youngest and oldest segments of society are most vulnerable to economic exclusion.

There is a need to expand economic activities, increase food security, generate employment, and ensure greater access to resources and opportunities. Cultural norms of reciprocity and sharing with the wider kinship group are being replaced by values that are linked to urban living and the monetary economy. Civil society organisations can work with local communities to identify and generate new economic opportunities. They can establish self-help groups and secure micro-finance for cash earning activities. They can work with families, young mothers, women and youth to build their capacity by the provision of information and training. CSOs can also play a significant advocacy role to influence pro-poor growth policies.

**Land, resources, and the environment:** Natural resource use, conservation and management is at the heart of human security. Land is often utilised inefficiently and under increasing pressure from population growth, leading to it becoming a major source of competition, tension and conflict. Extractive industries such as logging, mining and fishing have seriously depleted forest cover, degraded natural environments, and affected people's livelihoods. CSOs have a critical role to give voice to the concerns of local communities about the degradation of their environment, loss of biodiversity and the loss of livelihoods. In the long-term this will reduce conflict and support sustainable development.

**Education and awareness for reducing violence:** In multi-ethnic and multi-lingual PICs, nation building remains a challenge. In addition to the issue of violence, suicides are also uncommonly high in some countries of the region. Education can play an important role in combatting this. School curriculums need to focus on local content that deals with history, origins of different groups, their cultures, language studies, multiculturalism, explanations about migration and resource competition in order to help increase understanding and tolerance. This can also be supported by greater cooperation with CSOs as well as zero-tolerance for violence in schools, respect for the sanctity of the person, and gender equality, all of which can begin the process of changing attitudes and behaviour in wider society.

**Tackling misuse of arms:** Fortunately for the region, the civilian population and police forces remain largely unarmed. Small arms including combat weapons such as assault rifles, machine guns and automatic pistols are limited to areas that have experienced open violent conflict. Bougainville, Guadalcanal, and the PNG Southern Highlands have suffered significant casualties from the use of small

arms. Recent participatory studies have illustrated increases in violence linked to these weapons. Livelihoods and lives have been lost and communities are keen to see an end to gun violence. CSOs can help educate people about the negative consequences of gun use, identify the factors that contribute to gun violence and work towards the phasing out of guns from communities.

**HIV/AIDS and homophobia:** HIV/Aids has been increasing in PICs. The common risk factors are a large number of young people in the population, high levels of STDs, teenage pregnancies, and the tendency to have unprotected sex with multiple partners. There are many challenges to individuals and communities that range from tackling ignorance about STDs and HIV/AIDS, monitoring infections, treatment and the attitude of the wider community members to HIV/AIDS positive persons. Homophobia, moral judgement, and fear affect how infected persons are treated by communities. CSOs are already playing a significant role in partnership with governments and multilateral agencies to advocate and educate for greater health services and security.

## Conclusion

While there has been continued preoccupation with the securitisation of the state, human security has emerged as a transformative concept and framework. Through this concept, a more partner-centred approach between security actors is continuing to evolve. CSOs are already engaged in creating awareness of risks relating to health for instance, and tackling many of the threats to human security. Groups of youth, women, environmental and human rights activists have been educating and advocating about a range of issues that impinge on people and communities in the region. With the shift towards an integrated holistic approach to human security, they can be a portent partner to the state, regional and international development agencies in ensuring safer and secure communities. Their potential will be enhanced by the recognition of the work that they are currently doing, treating them as equal partners, making resources available to them and helping them to build their capacity.

## Notes

\* This paper is an updated version of an earlier presentation to the Workshop on Civil Society and Human Security, UNDP Pacific Centre and Citizens Constitutional Forum, at the Tokatoka Resort, Nadi. 25-26 April, 2007

- 1 The heavily remittance dependent economies of Samoa and Tonga have experienced growth. Samoa has engaged in the reform process most consistently and has shown annual growth rates over the last five years.
- 2 Some Pacific experts continue to subscribe to the notion of 'subsistence affluence' which in my view was not equally present in all PICs and in any case raises the issue of what is defined as affluence.
- 3 The ethnically exclusive Fijian military has engaged in four military coups undermining democratic electoral outcomes; the Solomon Island police were involved in the 2000 coup which overthrew Prime Minister Bart Ulufa'alu's government; the Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu security forces have mutinied periodically.

- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.forumsec.org/2016/05/23/deputy-secretary-general-andie-fong-toys-opening-remarks-at-the-workshop-on-mapping-of-private-security-in-the-pacific-islands-region/> Accessed 1 September, 2020.

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# Surviving the pandemic: COVID-19 in the Pacific and health security

*Hugh McClure, The Australian National University*

Pacific Island Countries and territories account for eight of the world's ten remaining nations with no recorded cases of COVID-19. Drawing on the Australia Pacific Security College's weekly *Trendlines – COVID-19: The Pacific Response* series, this paper investigates the policy responses employed by Pacific governments to this global pandemic.

The decisive responses taken by Pacific governments in the early days of the pandemic, including the response to snap close borders to international travel, has proven crucial in avoiding widespread catastrophe in many countries. While keeping the virus out of the region has been vindicated from a health perspective, border closures have had striking economic, social and political impacts, highlighting the nature of policymaking in a crisis. Management of the economic and social fallout continues as the cost of border closures continues to compound. The hurdle ahead is how Pacific governments can safely reopen their economies.

## Splendid isolation

If one were to design a geographical region to succeed in controlling a global pandemic, it might look something like the widely dispersed Pacific Islands Countries (PICs). Recognising the inherent geographic benefits of their Blue Pacific continent, governments capitalised upon their natural isolation, sealing their borders to international arrivals, including returning citizens, to safeguard against the introduction of COVID-19 into vulnerable communities.

With the memory not only of the deadly 2019 Samoan measles outbreak, as well as the 1918 Spanish Flu that claimed the lives of almost one-third of Samoa's population, policymakers conceded that the region's public health infrastructure was too underdeveloped to respond to an outbreak of a communicable respiratory illness. With health infrastructure painfully lacking, the decision was made that prevention was better than cure, and leaders made the most of the vast moat that is the Pacific Ocean.

The first country to seal their border was the Marshall Islands. Tonga, Kiribati, Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, Tuvalu and Nauru all followed suit. While the rest of the world has been ravaged by COVID-19, these island nations have remained largely virus free throughout 2020, something that, by October, Nauru's President said was a 'commendable' achievement (RNZ 2020a).

It must be noted that closed borders did not keep cases out of all countries. Owing to its role as a regional transportation hub, Fiji recorded a number of cases but the country's tracking, isolating, and testing mechanisms managed to keep the virus from spreading extensively within communities, helped by state of emergency restrictions. Most cases were confined to border quarantine centres. Similarly, the only cases in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have been in border quarantine. Border closures kept these countries virus-free for the majority of 2020, providing time to

develop border management systems, which have proven effective at keeping the virus out of the community at large.

In a Pacific Wayfinder podcast (2020), Dr Paulala Vivili, Director of the Public Health Division of the Pacific Community has said that the public health response has been strong across the region, protecting the clinical services response, where there are greater challenges.

## The uncomfortable truth

Throughout the pandemic, the most infected Pacific communities have consistently been the territories ruled by metropolitan powers, including the US territories of Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands and the French territories of New Caledonia and French Polynesia.

In the early stages of the pandemic, high case numbers in Guam, French Polynesia and New Caledonia were attributed to the rotation of officials from metropolitan countries. Through the early months, protests at airports in New Caledonia were frequent as French officials continued to arrive in Noumea and bypass customs and health checkpoints, despite mandatory 21-day quarantine arrangements. Pro-independence party president Daniel Goa responded, stating that France had failed to respect the Noumea Accord due to the continued rotation of officials and ordered the French High Commissioner to leave the country.

In the second half of the year, the exponential increase in cases witnessed in Guam and French Polynesia highlighted uncomfortable truths about policy autonomy for local administrations.

Despite strong opposition from indigenous Tahitians, French Polynesia's borders were re-opened to tourism in the second half of the year. Around 7500 tourists arrived in Tahiti from mid-July to mid-August, with 90 per cent travelling from the US and France. Despite mounting case numbers, French authorities dug their heels in to rule out any return to lockdown or the declaration of a second state of emergency. This decision came despite multiple French Polynesian unions threatening to strike unless COVID-19 measures were strengthened. While authorities did reintroduce the requirement to wear masks while travelling on public transport, many of the calls for other restrictions and protections were unanswered. As a result of the border reopening in July, the number of cases rose to 56 by the end of 2020.

It is not clear where these tensions will end. Despite being ultimately unsuccessful, New Caledonia's second independence referendum in as many years saw both an increased turnout and an increased pro-independence vote (Sartre and Doherty 2020).

In counterpoint, Guam's government responded swiftly to its second wave with lockdowns, presumably with the agreement of the US Government which manages the territories' border policies (RNZ 2020b).

## Coming home

Pacific Islanders are travellers by nature, and the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how many Pasifika people are overseas at any given point in time – for study, seasonal worker programs or family commitments. As months have passed, governments across the region have been reluctant to reopen their borders to international arrivals, including citizens stranded abroad.

The repatriation of seasonal workers who were on contract in Australia and New Zealand at the outbreak of the pandemic has been undeniably slow and has left families separated for an extended period. Samoan and ni-Vanuatu seasonal workers in New Zealand have been subjected to a stop-start approach to repatriation, largely due to the sheer size of the repatriation task, owing to the magnitude of their Seasonal Worker Program (SWP).

Many of the hurdles of repatriation are at the Pacific end. Governments are clearly anxious about the capacity of scarce quarantine, isolation and testing facilities to manage the large number of repatriates effectively, and have been cautious about the risk of introducing the virus into the community (Bedford 2020). Vanuatu Prime Minister Loughman halted repatriation in June due to fears that the queue of 2300 repatriates could overwhelm his country's quarantine facilities. Meanwhile, in Kiribati, President Maamau called for patience, refusing to allow citizens to return home until the government had built an isolation facility. Six months on, his citizens remain locked out (RNZ 2020c). While New Zealand has provided some assistance, repatriation of seasonal workers has placed a substantial financial burden on both Pacific countries and individuals, particularly those travelling from Australia.

Border quarantine processes have so far detected recent known positive cases entering Fiji. Despite the success of managing a consistent stream of arrivals to Fiji, there is concern that the country's acceptance of 'all stations' flights from India, stopping off in Jakarta and Port Moresby, is unduly increasing the risk level. Similarly, Prime Minister Sogavare in Solomon Islands heralded that his nation's quarantine systems had proven successful when that country's first and second cases were detected in border quarantine and were successfully isolated. Sogavare indicated that the decision to delay repatriation until facilities were ready has proven prudent. Despite this, widespread opposition was voiced over plans for a repatriation flight from China, which carried just over 80 government appointed Chinese architects to assist in works for the 2023 Pacific Games.

## Inside the bubble

In addition to border closures, Pacific governments moved quickly to declare states of emergency. Initially expected to run for 14 days, they were eventually declared for much longer periods. In Vanuatu, a state of emergency was declared until the end of 2020, despite the country having not recorded a single case of the virus. The pandemic marked the first time that state of emergency declarations were issued as a preventative measure, rather than as a reaction to crisis (Ride and Kekea 2020).

To enforce social distancing, churches, schools, markets and kava bars were forced to close their doors, changing the fabric and pulse of social Pacific lifestyles. With tightly policed curfews enacted, the vibrant streets that characterise the region quickly became deserted.

As weeks have turned into months, state of emergency enforcement has evolved into a vexed political issue. In Samoa, critics of the Prime Minister have said that his state of emergency restrictions are but a thinly-veiled excuse for him to implement his traditionalist beliefs on the country, such as that businesses should not trade on Sundays. In many parts of the region, the increased visibility of police, and the central role they have played in managing a public health crisis, has raised eyebrows (Thomson 2020). While state of emergency and lockdown restrictions curtailed the spread of the virus, the constitutionality of extended state of emergencies has been questioned in numerous parts of the region, including Vanuatu and French Polynesia (Mayron 2020).

The debate surrounding the state of emergency has perhaps been fiercest in PNG. Despite recommendations from the Parliament's Permanent Emergency Committee for the state of emergency to continue for two additional months, it was lifted in June 2020 after no new cases were recorded for 60 days. The state of emergency was replaced by the National Health Emergency Act 2020, a piece of legislation that has become the subject of criticism by anti-corruption agency Transparency International PNG (2020), for impinging on citizens' rights for an indefinite period with no parliamentary oversight. Debate has continued to be fierce, with former Prime Minister Peter O'Neill outlining that he did not support a state of emergency extension beyond 14 days, and he was backed up by the Governors of Madang, Eastern Highlands and East Sepik provinces.

Just as PNG's second wave took hold in August 2020, Prime Minister Marape declared his country must 'learn to live with the virus', allowing the 14 day second-wave lockdown period to lapse without any extension (Whiting 2020). Despite a 10:00pm–5:00am curfew remaining in place at the time, schools were re-opened and restrictions on inter-provincial travel were similarly lifted as case numbers skyrocketed.

The management of PNG's health resources is a fraught topic. Under strain, the PNG Nurses Association threatened industrial action over personal protective equipment shortages, while pressure built in August 2020 after the Rita Flynn Sports Complex, which had been the country's isolation facility, reached capacity amidst the country's second wave.

A month later, as case numbers continued to mount, Opposition Leader Belden Namah called on the government to remove all remaining COVID-19 restrictions, claiming the restrictions were crippling the nation's economy for little practical benefit. He stated that most deaths were attributable to pre-existing comorbidities.

## Economic fallout

In August 2020, the Asian Development Bank released its 2020 Pacific Economic Monitor (PEM) that showed a region-

wide economic contraction of 4.3 per cent. The PEM predicted that tourism-dependent economies, including Palau, the Cook Islands and Fiji would record the greatest contractions, with GDP in Fiji expected to shrink by 15 per cent. Looking to the future, the PEM forecast growth of 1.6 per cent in 2021 contingent upon the resumption of international travel.

If border closures were the chosen protection from failing health systems, then expansive stimulus payments were the buffer to the pandemic's economic fallout with governments across the region moving quickly to increase welfare payments to support a growing list of unemployed workers. While payments are helpful, they are far from enough.

The Fijian Government predicted the single largest economic contraction in Fijian history of 21.7 per cent, with remittances falling by 15 per cent and foreign direct investment reducing by 40 per cent. Faced with this grim economic outlook, the government presented a US\$390m (A\$554.8m) stimulus package early in the pandemic. The sizeable budget deficit pushed the debt to GDP ratio to 83.4 per cent, in part due to tax reductions of US\$232m (A\$330.6m), legislated to support businesses and stimulate consumer spending. With one third of the workforce having lost either their jobs or faced reduced hours, the Minister for the Economy outlined that 86,000 Fijians accessed relief payments from their pension fund in phase one, with 26,000 accessing support during phase two. If figures like these are replicated across the region, such unprecedented demand has the potential to overwhelm countries' embryonic welfare systems.

In response to Fiji's package, the University of the South Pacific economist Dr Naleesh Gounder said the government should have done more to diversify the country's economy (RNZ 2020d). Dr Gounder outlined that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the risks inherent to Fiji's narrow economic base, arguing now is an opportune time to develop alternate industries. Similarly, non-government organisations including the Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises Development (FRIEND) and the Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS) made clear their disappointment with the Budget (Rex 2020). FRIEND said that those engaged in the informal economy were largely ignored by the government's stimulus package. The FCOSS argued that the government focused disproportionately on supporting businesses, failing to appropriately assist families to make ends meet. Often, individuals must have superannuation accounts to register for welfare, disproportionately neglecting the many informal workers who are most vulnerable to economic hardship. Clan and kastom continue to be the safety net for the majority.

In PNG, the COVID-19 Economic Stimulus Package was developed. Several months after it was announced, Treasurer Ling-Stuckey outlined its content:

- US\$79m (A\$112.3m) investment in health and security;
- water sanitation and hygiene received US\$17m (A\$24.1m);
- frontline provincial health received US\$10m (A\$14.2m);
- US\$8.5m (A\$12.9m) for personal protective equipment;
- US\$1.4m (A\$1.99m) to churches for food provision;

- US\$21m (A\$29.87m) for constructing new border posts with Papua; and
- the government approved a US\$56m (A\$79.6m) relief package to boost small and medium enterprises in response to appeals from business for tax relief. In theory, the money will be allocated to commercial banks and the National Development Bank for low interest loans.

Delays in the release of funds have been reported. The PNG Micro-Small and Medium Enterprise Council has reported that US\$60.27m (A\$81.1m) in funding promised for Small and Medium Enterprises has not been received. Similarly, Prime Minister Marape apologised to church-run health facilities that were forced to close their doors due to a four-month delay in payments of salaries and operational funds. Such debates have had substantial implications on the political economy and day-to-day politics.

Elsewhere in the region, the French Polynesian Assembly approved an updated Budget to account for the territory's revenue shortfall of US\$150m (A\$213.4m). In Tonga, the 2020–21 Budget passed the parliament unanimously, in what marked the Kingdom's largest Budget deficit on record, totalling US\$26.4m (A\$37.6m). With remittances down, national revenue was reduced and the need for social support was greater. Niue, a country that has traditionally returned a balanced budget forecast a substantial deficit as a result of the altered economic climate during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rising debts are inevitable. At risk of economic instability, Pacific leaders are continuing to engage with diverse development partners for donor assistance and debt relief.

## Social affairs

As border closures have lingered, and much of the region has remained out of work, the impact on households has compounded throughout 2020.

Reflective of the higher unemployment rate exhibited, incidences of domestic and family violence have sharply increased. Fiji's Minister for Women has repeatedly outlined that the country's domestic violence hotline has received increased calls during the pandemic. Eighty-seven calls were placed with the nation's hotline in February 2020, a figure that rose to 527 by April of that year.

Further, just as the COVID-19 pandemic has been labelled the 'pink recession' in Western countries, women-led businesses in the Pacific are in heightened need of support. According to the head of the Pacific Trade and Investment Commission, Caleb Jarvis, women's reliance on the services and tourism industries has led to disproportionate impact. A survey revealed that 92 per cent of women entrepreneurs have suffered a drop in revenue. More pain is likely to come.

## Regional rescue

When Tropical Cyclone Harold made landfall in April 2020, the category five system drastically altered the nature of the COVID-19 response. In parts of the region, including Vanuatu's Sanma province, where 90 per cent of homes

were impacted, COVID-19 concerns took a backseat to the pressing humanitarian response as leaders had the melancholy duty of responding to the twin-emergencies of cyclone and pandemic and declared dual states of emergency.

With the usual humanitarian assistance support workers not able to access the region due to border closures, financial aid absorption capacity was limited. With both COVID-19 and Cyclone Harold aid flows entering the region simultaneously, and without the traditional rush of external humanitarian assistance, coordination was vital. The need for regional cooperation became clear. For the third time in its history, the Biketawa Declaration was invoked in April, as Pacific Island Forum foreign ministers met virtually and agreed to establish a Pacific Humanitarian Pathway on COVID-19 (PHP-C) to coordinate and prioritise assistance flows, as well as manage the increasingly complex political relationships with the ever-increasing list of donor partners. In the months since, PHP-C has been widely viewed as a win for the region – serving as a corridor to accelerate and coordinate humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of Cyclone Harold and also for the distribution of medical supplies such as testing kits and personal protective equipment for the COVID-19 response.

In August, the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat with the UN World Food Programme (2020) welcomed the launch of the Humanitarian Air Service that would assist with the aftermath of Cyclone Harold and also the distribution of medical supplies. The service made its maiden flight from Nadi to Port Moresby to deliver 44 cubic metres of essential medical supplies. The Air Service forms part of the PHP-C. Meanwhile, regional collaboration for border processes was discussed at a virtual roundtable convened by the United Nations and the Asian Development Bank. Representatives from Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Fiji attended and discussed border security quarantine processes hoping to streamline approaches, and accelerate the return of tourists.

## Playing the long game?

As leaders turn one eye to the future, the Pacific is a region in two parts. About 80 per cent of Pacific Islanders live rurally, many of whom have limited access to health services, and even sanitation. It is these communities that are most vulnerable to infectious diseases, and have the most to risk and the least to gain through the resumption of international travel and tourism. Frequently tested by natural disasters, Pacific Islanders have long returned to their gardens as the ultimate safety net, learning to live in subsistence affluence and relying on the social safety net provided by the *kastom* economy. In this pandemic, many have returned to villages to harvest their gardens and engage in subsistence agriculture and fishing. In some parts of the region, a return to traditional ways has also included the resumption of bartering and traditional money systems (Fainu 2020).

On the other side of the equation is the urbanised parts of the region, which are reliant on access to global markets. Many would like to revive the tourism industry, but the hopes for a region-wide travel bubble are looking dim, Fiji

Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama floated the idea of a ‘Bula Bubble’ to see tourists return to his country from Australia, New Zealand and other Pacific countries. Vanuatu’s Prime Minister announced a similar ‘Tam Tam Bubble’. Both proposals were dashed after their announcement. A ‘Realm Bubble’ between New Zealand, the Cook Islands and Niue has been raised periodically, but it too seems a way off.

In a novel approach, Fiji welcomed its first arrivals through the ‘Blue Lane’ strategy, which saw two visitors from New Zealand arrive on a boat after spending a fortnight quarantining at sea. While some have taken advantage of the pathway, it is a niche and expensive solution. It will take some time before tourism earnings will return to pre-COVID times.

Other industries have also been affected by the pandemic. Export-focused, resource-based economies including PNG and Solomon Islands have suffered reduced employment and reduced government revenue streams due to a drop in demand for natural resources, including timber and commodities.

## Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted almost every aspect of policymaking in the Pacific. Pacific governments’ decisive response to close borders has protected much of the region from a significant outbreak of the virus. For a region that continues to battle a non-communicable diseases epidemic and serious co-morbidities, the risk COVID-19 presents is significant.

The effective shutdown of much of the economic life of the region has highlighted many of the underlying policy challenges of the Pacific region. In 2021, the challenges of the region’s vulnerability to natural disasters, tensions of external governance in the region’s territories, persistent social issues including gender inequality, matters of political and economic management and the exposure of the region’s narrow economic base are each in sharp focus.

Leaders now face a range of policy challenges, as they seek to restimulate the economy in a way which boosts prosperity while continues to safeguard the health of the region. Despite the Australian Government making overtures to procure and provide vaccines to the region, leaders will struggle to find ways to balance the diverse security challenges facing the Pacific that the pandemic, and its response, have brought to the surface.

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# Reflections on a short history of epidemics in Samoa

Pamela Thomas, *The Australian National University*

This paper considers 150 years of epidemics in Samoa and their impact on society and traditional beliefs. Although information on pre-contact health and health practices is limited to a few Eurocentric mission sources, it is clear that ill health was dealt with in ways that were socially effective, if not always effective in curing disease. Prognosis and healing supported traditional beliefs, promoted mutual support within the family, reinforced the relative rank of both the living and the dead, and provided a therapeutic interlude for the entire extended family in which transgressions could be confessed and grievances aired. Not only were illness and death the impetus for large social gatherings attended by family from all over the country they were also an effective way of rapidly spreading infection.

## 1830–1930 The age of epidemics<sup>1</sup>

Following contact, the experience throughout the Pacific was much the same as in Samoa, and in some societies, notably Fiji and Tonga, it was worse. Epidemic after epidemic of previously unknown diseases killed not only new generations of children but young and older adults (Table 1). In Western Samoa, following the arrival of the ship ‘Messenger of Peace’ which carried the European missionaries, Williams and Barff and six Tahitian teachers, the first epidemic of influenza broke out.

As Turner (1861:222) reports:

The natives at once traced the disease to the foreigners and the new religion ... ever since there have been returns of the disease almost annually ... in some cases it is fatal to old people and those who have been previously weakened by pulmonary disease. There was an attack in May 1837, another in November 1846, both of which were unusually severe and fatal ... In 1849 hooping cough [sic] made its appearance and a good many children died ... In 1851 another new disease arrived – mumps. It was traced to a vessel from California and soon spread all over the group. Scarcely a native escaped ... the universal opinion of the Samoan people is that the mortality is now greater among the young and middle-aged people than formerly”.

Mills (1839) writes that those who did not immediately succumb to these diseases were left with pulmonary complications and ‘vast numbers (were) taken off after the disease itself was removed’.

In 1893, Samoa ‘was in the throes of an epidemic of measles which prostrated the whole group ... the mortality was excessive’ (Collier 1893). Bleazard (1896:1) of the Methodist Mission reports that ‘This is the first experience of measles ... and it is exceedingly bitter. All are being, or have been, attacked and many have been carried off’ while Collier (1893:2) wrote ‘The death-rate is very high notwithstanding the precautions which have been taken to keep it down’. No sooner had the measles epidemic abated than an epidemic of diarrhoea and dysentery followed

resulting in the death of a great number of children (Bleazard 1896:1).

Not surprisingly, by the turn of the century population estimates show a marked decline and it was believed that Pacific Island people were doomed to extinction. In 1875, measles alone killed 40,000 Fijians.<sup>2</sup> In Fiji, ‘Whole communities were struck at one time ... there was nobody left to gather food or carry water’ (Thomson 1896 in McArthur 1967:76). Not only were populations thought to be declining, the general standard of health was considered by Europeans to be deteriorating. Worse was to come. The age of epidemics reached its peak in Western Samoa in 1918 with the influenza pandemic.

Table 1: Major epidemics in Western Samoa 1830–1930

Date	Disease	Source
1830	Influenza	Turner 1861
1837	Influenza	Mills 1839
1839	Influenza	Pratt 1849
1846	Influenza	Pratt 1849
1849	Whooping Cough	Erskine 1853
1851	Mumps	Turner 1861
1891	Influenza	Collier 1893
1893	Measles	Carne 1793
1907	Dysentery/Whooping Cough	McArthur 1967
1911	Measles/Dysentery	McArthur 1967
1915	Measles	McArthur 1967
1918	Influenza Pandemic	AJHR A-4 1923
1923–24	Dysentery	AJHR A-4 1926
1926	Whooping Cough	McArthur 1967

Note: This information was compiled by the author.

## The Influenza Pandemic

In 1918, the *SS Talune* arrived and a passenger carrying influenza was allowed off the ship. In a highly social and mobile society the disease spread quickly and six weeks later nearly one third of the population (7542 persons), had died (New Zealand Parliamentary Papers H31c3). Mortality was selective, affecting more men than women, and both ran higher risks of dying than children. Those with a tendency to obesity were particularly prone (Pirie 1963:78). Thirty per cent of all adult men and 25 per cent of adult women died. Within the male population, 45 per cent of Samoan *matai* (chiefs) and nearly 50 per cent of Samoan church leaders died. Goodall (1954:36) reports that ‘of 220 Samoan pastors in active service 103 died ... twenty-nine out of 30 members of the Council of Elders (*Au Toieaina*)



were among the casualties'. In addition 65 per cent of all Samoan Roman Catholic catechists died (Pirie 1963:78).

Whole villages were wiped out, houses fell into disrepair, plantations were overgrown and the death of nearly half the sacred and secular leaders threw surviving villagers into confusion. Neither belief in traditional religion nor Christianity were effective protection.

For Samoans it was this epidemic, not the Great War, which marked the watershed between two eras. The survivors were bereft not only of relatives, friends and leaders; they were bereft of confidence, and in many instances, of a faith equal to such a strain (Goodall 1954:362).

## Health responses to introduced diseases

Samoan perceptions of this sudden and continued influx of unknown and deadly diseases and the ineffectiveness of traditional healers to deal with it seems to have gone unrecorded, except for brief European comments of social disruption and demoralisation. I could find no mention of these events in Samoan myths or stories and family genealogies appear to have ignored the havoc this disruption must have caused in title succession. However, there was a dramatic increase in belief in Christianity and adherence to the London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Catholic Church. In addition, there was an upsurge in Samoan offshoots of different religious denominations and an increase in Samoan 'visionaries' and faith healers – a situation which continues today.

## The New Zealand response

Following the pandemic, for which the New Zealand Administration felt responsible, the New Zealand Government put considerable funding and effort into improving health with a particular focus on the health of women and children. In 1923, a system of community-based primary health care was established, based on New Zealand's health policy of equality of access and community participation in health care. In Samoa, the NZ Administrator, the highest ranking New Zealander in the country, adhering to Samoan etiquette, went on a ceremonial Samoan journey (*malaga*) to all villages in Samoa where he met the village *fono* (Council) to enquire about the health situation in the village and what the chiefs thought might be done about it. When some suggested that women be given information on how to care for children's health, he enquired if the *fono* would support the establishment of a women's health group or committee in their village. High ranking women could be trained in basic health matters and first aid and take responsibility for the health of the village women and children. This was accepted by all villages and young women from highly ranked families were trained in basic health care for women and children and travelled the country together with an American, and later a New Zealand, woman doctor<sup>3</sup> to establish the women's health committees. By 1925, all villages in Samoa had a Women's Health Committee presided over by the wife of the high chief and/or the wife of the pastor. For nearly 100 years the committees were visited regularly by a trained health

worker and later were responsible for ensuring children were fully immunised against diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, polio, TB and measles.

## 2019–20 The measles epidemic

To a large extent the committees still function but for some time now have been known as Women's Committees to allow inclusion of other 'economic development' activities which often take precedence over health. This weakening of the committees and the decline in children receiving the security of full immunisation, together with the periodic emergence of 'faith healing' movements which discourage immunisation and other forms of modern medicine, are perhaps in part responsible for the 2019–20 measles epidemic that led to the death of 97 children. In an effort to halt the measles epidemic and aware of the strength of faith healing groups opposed to immunisation, the Samoan Parliament moved quickly and in late December 2019 passed the Infants Amendment Bill 2019 making it compulsory for every child in Samoa to be vaccinated against measles when they reached the eligible age of six months. It also required that each child being enrolled for school produce their vaccination and immunisation records with heavy fines for school principals who were lax in applying the regulation.

## Faith-inspired healing movements

Shortly after passing the Infants Amendment Bill, the government closed down Kangan Water, a group selling bottled water that was widely believed to have 'divine' healing properties. Radio New Zealand reported that Kangan Water was considered to be 'one of the most common home remedies...in Apia it was not uncommon to see queues of cars waiting to buy it' (RNZ 2020:2–6).

Belief in Kangan Water would seem to exemplify a continued need for healing beliefs outside the formal health system. The largest, best known, and perhaps the most disruptive, of these quasi-religious groups was Emanuelu. Based to some extent on American television faith healing programs, group healing was exemplified by chants, hymns, laying on of hands, sprinkling with blessed water, special incantations, prayers and speaking in tongues. Followers were encouraged to throw away their medication as Jesus would heal – to use medication or allow vaccination indicated lack of faith. Emanuelu became so popular it had groups operating in 27 villages, creating considerable disruptions and difficulties for the Department of Health and in particular for the immunisation programmes conducted by the Women's Committees. Emanuelu was eventually formally "discouraged" but as in the past, small religiously-inspired healers continued to emerge and gain followers.

## COVID-19

In the case of COVID-19, Samoa, with its large numbers of family members in New Zealand, Australia and the United States, many of whom return to Samoa for important family functions, could be considered at very high risk of another pandemic but to date there have been few cases. Perhaps it

is worth considering the security action of American Samoa in the great influenza pandemic when they isolated their islands by closing all maritime borders. They remained secure from the disease while Western Samoa lost nearly one-third of its population. As we now see with COVID-19 in Australia and New Zealand there is security in isolation.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Much of the historical information in this paper is based on work I undertook for my unpublished PhD thesis, ANU, 1986.
- <sup>2</sup> Almost one-third of the population, <https://devastatingdisasters.com>
- <sup>2</sup> To find a woman doctor anywhere at the time was unusual, but to find two women doctors in Samoa at this time was almost unbelievable. They were Dr Mabel Christie, a very early NZ medical graduate, and Dr Regina Flood Keyes, wife of the American consul and former US Army doctor.

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# Advancing opportunities at the intersection of Pacific security and health

*Nicholas Thomson, The Australian National University*

In 2019, *The Lancet* released a special issue exploring the potential of harnessing synergies between the security and health sectors where doing so would improve individual and public health outcomes without undermining human rights (Thomson et al. 2019). Citing recent examples of the use of militaries in support of public health responses to infectious disease outbreaks, the series noted that if partnerships between public health and public security were more critically examined for potential synergies, responses to incidents affecting health and disease outbreaks could be immensely improved. However, there are a number of practical considerations. Understanding how security and health actors exist across operational cultures and power dynamics, as well as relevant interests and capacity requires long term vision, investment in developing sectoral and partnership capabilities, and sophisticated political and policy frameworks.

Partnerships between health and security are not uncommon across a whole range of important areas, from responding to road trauma and countering domestic violence through to disaster response and containing biological threats. But these partnerships are often undocumented and unrecognised and therefore underexplored and underappreciated. While *The Lancet* series shed new light on the relationships between health and security, it didn't explore the potential scope and application of partnerships between security and health in responding to an expanded suite of threats. It didn't unpack, expand, or challenge current discourses around concepts of health-security.

## Concepts of health and security

For many governments around the world, recent infectious disease outbreaks such as Ebola and COVID-19 have heightened awareness of 'health-security' interactions that involve both incident management, politics and actions designed to prepare for, and respond to, biological threats – a process that can be narrowly defined and contested with respect to roles and responsibilities. At various times and through different lenses and institutions, 'health-security' has had a range of different meanings, from the threat of antimicrobial resistance on global human health to the morbidity and mortality implications of non-communicable diseases for fragile health systems (Stoeva 2020). But the idea of health as a security issue takes on much broader dimensions and implications as elaborated by the original United Nations construct of health as the key pillar of human security (Chiu et al. 2009).

Human security itself is explicitly linked to the fundamental 'right to health' first articulated in the 1946 Constitution of the World Health Organisation. It ensures that health-security directly interfaces and grapples with the often daily challenges of sustaining access to adequate food, water and shelter against a backdrop of climate degradation, conflict and issues of agency, empowerment and governance. In many cases, health issues can result in

acute population health crises which, when under a combined 'health-security' rubric can translate into and gain traction. The notion of 'health' as a construct of national security often sits very uncomfortably within the security sphere (Bernard 2013). There are many public health actors who believe that using health as a construct of security legitimises authoritarian restrictions to such fundamental aspects of human life as the right to freedom of movement, as occurred with protests about prolonged Pacific States of Emergency in countries such as PNG and Vanuatu. This wariness plays into the often fundamental distrust that exists between a government and the people in the context of how 'security' is enacted.

So while there are potentially multiple definitions and conceptualisations of health-security, this paper explores the two-way interactions that view health as a construct of security, and security as a construct of health. This more systemic understanding is critical to understanding the interactions between the two, and how to respond to an ever widening range of threats that have both health and security implications. There is perhaps no better current opportunity for this inter-sectoral work than the Pacific's Boe Declaration's expanded security concept that encompasses both human and traditional security. The advantage of taking into account climate, human, environmental and resource security alongside the traditional security threats of transnational crimes, cybercrime and cyber-enabled crimes is that health and national security truly become a whole-of-society construct and the responsibility of all to own and implement.

These different security challenges are truly interconnected. For example, despite being responsible for only .03 per cent of the world greenhouse gas emissions, Pacific island communities are amongst the most vulnerable societies to the health and security impacts of climate change. Increased exposure to acute weather events has widespread implications for health and security such as the physical impacts of climate change on the safety and security of water and food, and the increased risk from vector borne and non-communicable diseases (NCDs), the latter from impacts on fresh food production (McIver et al. 2016) and comorbidity. Local food production is entirely dependent on both water availability and management just as the sustainability of what you catch and farm in the ocean is determined by the health and security of the marine environment. Extreme climatic events exacerbate clean water access in some areas of the Pacific region where many rural communities face water insecurity (Chan et al. 2020).

## Actors at the intersection of security and health

Efforts are already underway in many countries in the region to articulate whole of government and whole of society approaches to the health and security threats

relevant to the Boe Declaration. For example, by recognising that environmental and human health are directly linked to climate change, many Pacific island countries are at the forefront of a new global response to climate through promotion of renewable energy targets and highlighting the importance of the ocean-climate nexus, particularly on fisheries (Government of Fiji 2018). But policies and frameworks are only half the battle. Identifying a full range of actors that have a stake in, and capacity to act across a complex array of intersecting issues is complex, as is clarifying what their roles and responsibilities are.

For example, in recognising that NCDs pose a significant threat to health and sustainable development in the Pacific, Pacific ministers endorsed the Pacific NCD Roadmap at the Joint Forum Economic and Health Ministers Meeting in 2014. The NCD Roadmap lays out policies, legislation and actions to be taken by a number of diverse stakeholders including health, education, trade and law enforcement. The NCD Roadmap is also meant to be supported by a National Multi-Sector Task Force to oversee the implementation of the National Multi-Sector NCD Action Plan. A recent review of the programme however has highlighted that these leadership and governance structures have been either missing or functioning at a suboptimal level (Win Tin et al. 2020).

So herein lies a challenge. How do you identify and empower a full range of actors who may see the world differently and have different interests to come together and support a whole-of-society approach to engagement and respond to diverse challenges at the intersection of security and health? How do you create a concept of health and security where a police commander in the Highlands of PNG understands that the high incidence of NCDs in the police force and society can create power, security and capacity shortfall, if not better addressed? How do you design a training package for maritime customs officials that improves their biosecurity awareness when they board an illegal fishing boat? And, how can you support small farm holders and local market managers to maintain food production and the supply chains when situations such as COVID-19 prevent access to key agriculture production materials or risk community transition of the disease? And given how interconnected the security and health challenges are, how do we ensure our national security strategies and their policy and operational responses affecting health and security are well integrated?

Integrating policy responses across a multi-issue national security framework and ensuring it draws on and accounts for local customary practices, science and technology, and public-private partnerships is critical, but challenging. In meeting the objectives of the Boe Declaration, national security strategy development and implementation will require widespread consultation and agency collaboration across the cross-cutting threats. It will also require bringing stakeholders together who may not have seen themselves as part of national security before nor would ordinarily work together; this can include health, agriculture and infrastructure officials. Developing the human resource capacities and core competencies of these people is needed to work across the issues that span health

and security areas. This requires carefully crafted institutional arrangements, and well-resourced efforts. This was evident in the establishment of the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway that addressed needs for biosecurity, health supplies and cyclone relief following Cyclone Harold and COVID-19 impacts, last year.

## **Building momentum at the intersection of security and health**

Advancing whole of government and community approaches to health and security in the Pacific region can be facilitated by the development of national security strategies that are backed by multiple actors. Individual agencies will also need to invest in their own capabilities and their understanding of how their areas of interests are affected by the actions and interests of other agencies. For example, more investment is needed to build the baseline capabilities of security actors to understand their role in preparing and responding to biological threats, and development of training materials that cover subject matter not traditionally covered in the police recruit training. Building a level of recognition across the security sectors of their critical role as partners in supporting health (broadly defined) should translate to better health and security outcomes and support better relationships across the security–civilian nexus. At the same time, bringing in subject matter stakeholders from diverse government agencies to consider threats to national security will grow understanding, respect, and a sense of shared responsibility for the national security strategies that are owned by a collective rather than being the purview of a select few.

Building these capacities across the various systems will take time but it will be a worthy exercise over the coming years. There are already some efforts underway to meet the professional and academic capacities required to enhance a multidisciplinary approach to intersecting issues that cut across both health and security challenges. The Fiji National University and the Australia Pacific Security College at ANU, guided by a regional industry advisory committee of health and security sector officials from the region is developing a Security and Health course for students and professionals working across core areas of health and security. The course will combine academic interrogation and operational perspectives from the field and is being designed to explore the intersection of health and security in the Pacific region. The course also seeks to advance subject matter knowledge with opportunities to grow multidisciplinary and multi-agency partnerships, collaborations and networks that support both health and security outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

Health is placed at the forefront of security and ushers in multiple opportunities to respond to the critical issues facing the region and indeed the globe. It also demands a re-envisioning of how we develop national security strategies which need to address mounting health security issues, and critically consider who needs to be involved beyond the traditional security sector. Investing

in the development of people and the range of sectors from which they come is required now to ensure the Boe Declaration is enabled through multi-stakeholder collaborations to develop action and institutions that can deliver positive and shared outcomes at the intersection of health and security for the Pacific.

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# Security issues for women and children in Papua New Guinea

*Philip Gibbs and Lorelle Yakam, Divine Word University, Papua New Guinea*

Recently a woman at a protest caused a stir by carrying a placard reading 'PNG is not safe to live as a female'. She was drawing attention to the fact that in Papua New Guinea, women and children endure shockingly high levels of family and sexual violence, with rates of abuse estimated to be among the highest in the world outside of a conflict zone. Between 2007 and 2016, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) treated 27,993 survivors of family and sexual violence in the country (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2016) and findings from the 2016–18 Papua New Guinea Demographic Health Survey (PNG DHS) reported that 63 per cent of married and divorced women interviewed have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional spousal violence, most commonly physical violence (54 per cent), followed by emotional violence (51 per cent). An estimated 66 per cent of women in PNG are survivors of domestic violence (Human Rights Watch, 2019), and at least 200 women die each year from violent assaults prompted by witchcraft accusations.

The vicious assault of athlete Debbie Kaore and the violent death of Jenelyn Kennedy, a 19-year-old mother of three in Port Moresby in June 2020, saw mass protests across the country calling for change. Factors leading to Jenelyn's death included a system that allows underage marriage, gender norms that legitimise violence, and the failure of the country's law, justice, and health sectors. According to the National Demographic Health Survey, 70 per cent of women and 72 per cent of men believe that a husband is justified in beating his wife if she neglects the children or goes out without telling him (50 per cent and 49 per cent). A cause for concern is the finding that women's experience of spousal violence increases with improved education and household wealth. Fifty-five per cent of women with an elementary education reported experiencing spousal violence, compared with 76 per cent of women with a higher education.

Dulciana Somare-Brash, daughter of former Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare, says that for many reasons she feels unsafe in her own country.

No man (or woman) should tell me I'm safe here in PNG when I have so little control over everything that happens around me and to me, in my world that simply means I'm unsafe as a female in PNG (Dulciana Somare-Brash 2020).

Children are also at risk. MSF has found that more than half of all MSF consultations for survivors of sexual violence were with children, with around one in six with children younger than five years. Children also made up one in three of all family violence consultations in Port Moresby. One in ten adult women reported that the latest incident of sexual violence was part of a repeated or ongoing pattern. For children, this risk was heightened, with almost two in five children experiencing repeated or ongoing sexual violence.

According to the 2015 Lukautim Pikinini Child Welfare Policy, around 75 per cent of children experience physical abuse at home. The Office of Public Prosecutor estimates that 55 per cent of all sexual violence cases dealt with the abuse of children under 16 years old.

Although the country passed a law in 2015 to strengthen child protection efforts in compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, implementing regulations were incomplete. Customary and traditional practices allow marriage of children as young as 12, and early marriage is common in many traditional, isolated, rural communities. Child brides are taken as additional wives or given as brides to pay family debts and used as domestic servants. Child brides are particularly vulnerable to domestic abuse.

## Security and victims' services support

There are family and sexual violence units in police stations across the country, designed to provide victims with protection, assistance through the judicial process, and medical care. Police intervention has led to improved services for victims of gender-based violence in some provinces, but comprehensive services for victims of domestic and sexual violence are lacking in much of the country. This lack of services, along with societal and family pressure, has often forced women back into violent and abusive homes. Independent observers have noted that approximately 90 per cent of women in prison were convicted for attacking or killing their husband or another woman.

For many women, the only safe place to go is to their own family, particularly if their parents are still alive or if they have a sympathetic sibling. That is not always possible, so another possibility in larger towns is a 'safe house'. Human Rights Watch reports that there are five shelters for abused women in Port Moresby, which are often so full they cannot always accept women in need of counselling and shelter. The City Mission administers Haus Ruth in Port Moresby and Haus Clare in Lae. City Mission has teamed up with World Vision, Childfund, and the PNG government to open the first government-certified Children's Crisis Centre in the country so that Haus Ruth serves as the combined GBV Women's Centre and Children's Crisis Centre providing shelter, medical attention, counselling, and social services for women and their children. The Crisis Centre in Port Moresby also provides short-term residential care for orphans, abused children, and those whose parents have been impacted by HIV/AIDS.

NGOs and faith based organisations (FBOs) provide safe house facilities in other parts of the country. Oxfam in Goroka has taken the lead in providing support for those suffering from sorcery accusations, and an Oxfam supported

Case Management Centre in Lae provides women affected by sexual and family violence with the counselling, support and intervention they need to obtain protection and justice. Femili PNG runs Case Management Centres in Port Moresby and Lae to assist survivors of family and sexual violence.

Other support centres include: Links of Hope in Port Moresby and Mount Hagen which provide support for children affected by HIV and AIDS; Human Rights Defenders in Simbu Province; Voice for Change assists with education and help for victims in Jiwaka Province; and Mercy Works provide support services in Mount Hagen, Goroka, Simbu, Kiunga, Wewak, and Port Moresby. Allied organisations include Cheshire disability services, the WeCare Foundation, and the Hohola Youth Development Centre in Port Moresby. The Catholic Church has a network of small agencies that have been providing temporary shelter for battered women, children and victims of family and sexual violence in Wewak, Kokopo, Madang, Bougainville and Port Moresby.

## Maternal and child mortality rates

Childbearing in Papua New Guinea is a risky business. The Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) in PNG is considered the highest in the Pacific region, with between 215 to over 900 deaths per 100,000 live births. These figures indicate a serious safety situation for mothers in PNG and an urgent need to improve maternal health outcomes. Only 56 per cent of women in PNG give birth in a health facility, but that does not mean the birth is supervised by a skilled birth attendant, or that the facility has the necessary skills to support a safe birth. Papua New Guinea has the lowest rates of skilled birth attendants in the Western Pacific, with an estimated 6000 more skilled birth attendants needed to meet the global safety standard (WHO 2019).

The health of some mothers has already been compromised by infections such as HIV or syphilis. Among the concerns of pregnant women infected with HIV is whether they will survive to carry their pregnancy to term and if their child will be born with HIV. In the Papua New Guinea Highlands, health services have sought ways to ensure that infected mothers remain healthy, have a supervised delivery, and that their child will not be infected with HIV or syphilis.

In many cases, facilities lack basics such as running water and electricity needed to ensure a safe and sanitary environment for giving birth. Many facilities do not have refrigerators for vaccines or adequate stock of essential drugs or supplies to treat common conditions. In PNG, one in every 50 children dies within the first month of life and one of every 20 children dies before reaching their fifth birthday (PNG DHS 2016–18, 8.1). A survey found that only 18 per cent of children aged 6–23 months that live with their mothers were fed a minimum acceptable diet in the 24 hours preceding the interview while 32 per cent of children had an adequately diverse diet in which they had been given foods from at least five food groups. Only 44 per cent had been fed the minimum number of times a day appropriate for their age (PNG DHS 2016–18, 11.1.5).

The survival of infants and children depends in part on the demographic and biological characteristics of their mothers. The probability of dying in infancy is much greater among children born to mothers who are under age 18 or over age 34, children born after a short birth interval (less than 24 months after the preceding birth), and children born to mothers of high parity (more than three children). The risk is elevated when a child is born to a mother who has a combination of these risk characteristics, which is too often the case in Papua New Guinea.

## Safety on public transport

Women are majority users of public transport and depend heavily on these systems for mobility as they often do not own or have access to private vehicles. However, there is a growing body of evidence that many women simply do not feel safe or secure while using public transport. For women and girls, sexual harassment and other gender-related security issues are important concerns. Harassment covers a wide range of behaviours of a threatening or offensive nature, from unwanted attention to physical or sexual assault.

A scoping study conducted by UN Women in 2014 in Port Moresby found that more than 90 per cent of women and girls experienced some form of violence when accessing public transport, including on buses, waiting at bus stops, walking to and from bus stops, or in taxis. This includes verbal sexual remarks, inappropriate touching, and indecent exposure in terms of sexual violence. They are also victims of extortion, robbery, threats, or intimidation (UN Women 2014). In response, special buses have been started in Port Moresby and recently in Lae, as part of the Safe Cities Initiative. The women-only transportation program began exclusively as a free-to-ride service called Meri Seif (Safe Woman). A young, female university student comments:

I feel so safe when I get on the Meri Seif bus, I can easily pull out my phone and listen to music and actually make a phone call. On the public motor vehicles (PMVs), the thieves just walk on, and when they see ladies holding their bags, they just grab them or threaten [the women] (Women's UN Report Network 2019).

From 2014 to mid-2019, the number of Meri Seif buses rose from one to 11, the number of routes from one to six, and the number of riders from 21,000 to more than 600,000. The pilot was so successful that the Ginigoda Foundation has started the M-Bus, a pay-to-ride program, to move the model toward financial sustainability.

The program faces hostility from some men, who have thrown marbles through bus windows, threatened women drivers at knifepoint, and tried to force themselves aboard the buses. While no serious injuries have occurred – each bus has two male security guards – safe travel around Port Moresby remains elusive. In 2018 UN Women trained more than 100 PMV drivers, crew members, and operators in the importance of safe transport for women. The overall message to the drivers was clear: If you had kept women safe on your buses in the first place, the city would not need women-only transportation.

## Market place security

Urban markets are not secure for female traders especially in larger towns such as Port Moresby or Mount Hagen. Eighty per cent of market vendors are women and over half of women market vendors in PNG have to bring their children to the market as many of the younger children do not attend school. Women and girls are bullied by market security, intimidated by police and sexually harassed throughout the day. People try to rob vendors on their way to the bus stop and they have to contend with unreliable public transport as they try to get home. Women even refrain from using toilets or other spaces in the markets, because they fear being attacked by ‘rascals’ or intoxicated men and boys who roam the markets.

Female market vendors suffer from extortion on a regular basis. In the absence of police or security guards that will protect women and girls, and with high levels of unruly and provocative behaviour, women are under pressure to pay public nuisances and potential perpetrators of violence with their produce or cash for ‘protection’ to avoid confrontation or violent incidents. Women vendors who have not been able to find space inside the market premises or feel safer sitting in the periphery of the markets are sometimes forced to pay double fees otherwise they face constant harassment and incur other safety and health issues by sitting on the side of the road.

A UN study of markets in Port Moresby, found that 55 per cent of the women and girls who participated, reported that they have experienced some form of violence in the markets surveyed (UN Women 2012). Twenty-two per cent of female respondents report having experienced more than one incidence of sexual violence while in the markets in the last 12 months, and 64 per cent of both male and female respondents reported witnessing some form of sexual violence against women and girls in the markets and vicinity. At least 78 per cent of the perpetrators of all forms of violence are men, and the large majority are adolescent boys or young men. Other common perpetrators of violence identified included the police and other market vendors who fight for spaces in the market.

The UN Women Safe City project in Port Moresby,<sup>1</sup> has led to the redesign of the main markets and market stalls to make them more open and safer; increased access to clean drinking water, and improved sanitation and safety of toilet blocks. Such improvements in the capital city remain only a dream for vendors in provincial towns such as Goroka, Kundiawa, Wabag and Mendi. Despite markets becoming safer and the widespread campaign against violence, the lack of safety of women and girls outside markets is still a major issue.

## Safety when trekking to school

Security issues also affect many children as they head to school. Some children travel by boat or canoe which can be treacherous in bad weather. Others need to cross fast-flowing rivers each day. Bridges in the area are made of narrow tree logs, and rainfall makes them slippery. At times, the log bridges are completely washed away, or the

road is badly damaged, making it difficult for children to attend school safely.

When children at Ambullua in the Jiwaka Province were asked for ideas to make the bridge they had to cross safer, they suggested the construction of an iron foot bridge, but recognised that the limited road network servicing Ambullua would make it impossible to transport iron into the community. As an alternative, they suggested strengthening the bridges with additional logs, ropes, and bamboo, and to ensure that bridges are replaced as they start to deteriorate or when safety issues are reported (McKenna et al, 2020).

The long trek to school is illustrated well in a film by Raphael Lauer, ‘Most Dangerous Ways to School’ (Lauer 2015). The children in the film walk seven days across the Papuan Plateau from Mount Busavi to attend school in Moro in the Southern Highlands Province.

Safety issues also surround children living in urban areas, who walk to school every day in some very dangerous suburbs. For instance a four year old girl living in East Taraka, one of the most dangerous suburbs in Lae, Morobe Province, walks for 45 minutes to school every day (Gabana, n.d.). Some children walk long distances to catch one or more buses or public motor vehicles (PMVs) every day (World Vision Australia, n.d.). Concerns around children’s safety on the road and catching PMVs have increased in the urban centres especially since road deaths, accidents, and crime rates have increased (World Bank 2014; Road Traffic Authority 2019).

## Women’s security, land and logging

Land gives local people a sense of security, identity and belonging. Spiritually they identify with the land as part of their history; their ancestors who are buried on their land provided villagers with their songs, masks, dances, magical spells, clans, and certain species of taro, bananas, and pigs. Matthias Lopa from Pomio summarises:

if we give our land away, or if someone has taken it through commercial means, then we come to realise that our life is taken away and our sense of connectedness is disturbed because land is our life. The graves of our ancestors give us a sense of belonging. If that land is taken away for 99 years, then we become nobody (Gibbs and Lopa 2019).

While it is often thought that 97 per cent of PNG’s total land area remains under the customary ownership of the local indigenous people. This is no longer true. The PNG Land Act (1996) contains provisions that enable the state to lease land from customary landowners and then lease it back to other persons or organisations. In the eight years from 2003 to 2010, almost ten per cent of PNG’s total land area was alienated from its customary owners and transferred to private companies through this lease-leaseback scheme. The leases came to be known as Special Agricultural Business Leases (SABL) and more than five million hectares of customary land have been alienated in over 70 leases to landowner companies associated with some rather dubious ‘development partners’, most of whom appear to be logging or oil palm companies.



This alienation of customary land is having a very negative impact on women, most particularly in the New Guinea Islands region. Women report increasing domestic violence, teenage pregnancy and drug abuse in their communities as logging and oil palm plantations have moved in (Cannon 2020). Traditionally, women, particularly in matrilineal societies, have been the stewards of the land and passed it down to their children, but are now sidelined in discussions about land ‘development’. In their Country Gender assessment of agriculture in the rural sector of PNG, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), reported:

While women typically have user rights to cultivate land, gather forest products and fish or collect marine resources, they rarely hold ownership rights or have associated control over productive resources. This tends to be the case regardless of whether an inheritance system is patrilineal or matrilineal (FAO 2019:17).

## Security and elections

Papua New Guinea is one of four countries in the world without any elected female representatives currently in Parliament. In the last election no women were elected to the 111-seat Parliament, and only five per cent of candidates were female (167 of 3332). This is indicative of the barriers and security issues women face in participating fully in the political process. There are threats of violence throughout the country with regional variation but most often throughout the Highlands region, where elections are notably more violent and entrenched cultural norms are reinforced by the highly patriarchal society. In the last election 40 people were killed, including four police officers. Election related violence occurs in both the public and private spheres with female voters facing direct threats of violence not only at the polls, but also threats of divorce and abandonment at home. When women have access to the polls the men in their families instruct them on who to vote for (Haley, N and K Zubrinich 2018).

Women, reportedly ranging in age from 13 to 29, in some places called ‘coffee ladies’ will moonlight as sex workers in political campaign houses (sometimes referred to as ‘animal houses’) during the electoral period in exchange for money or food and in some cases, families will encourage young girls to provide sexual services in exchange for votes (Gibbs 2009). The use of voting as a marker for family loyalty is prevalent and can cause conflict in a woman’s life if a member of her and her husband’s family is contesting. If she votes against her relative, she may be disowned by her own family. Interviewees also report that those who vote against their family face gossip and shaming on social media from other members of the community. Voice for Change, an NGO focusing on combating violence against women in the Highlands, has reported that supporters of female candidates face threats, physical violence, and property damage from supporters of rival candidates. To increase the security of female voters, there have been recommendations that the Papua New Guinea Electoral Commission (PNGEC) ensure that there are separate polling compartments as well as lines for men and women with some distance between them to ensure that

women have secrecy of the ballot and are not influenced at the polling stations.

## Conclusion

Women and children in Papua New Guinea face a range of institutional and domestic security issues. Government departments such as the Department of Justice and Attorney General, non-government organisations and faith-based bodies seek to aid those affected and to bring about change. However, throughout the nation, security concerns such as domestic violence, sorcery accusations, maternal and child mortality, intimidation in elections and disempowerment of women at logging sites remain major issues. Perpetrators continue with few repercussions. Papua New Guinea remains a very dangerous place for women and children.

## Notes

- 1 Develops, implements, and evaluates tools, policies and comprehensive approaches on the prevention of and response to sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls across different settings.

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# Improving the security of women and children: A personal reflection

*Lilly Be'Soer Kolts, Voice for Change, Papua New Guinea*

*Almost fifteen years ago, my family was internally displaced due to ongoing tribal fights spanning decades that destroyed both property and life in my husband's home in the Western Highlands Province. As a professional couple with children and a successful small business, we refused to contribute cash towards the purchase of guns to arm my husband's tribesmen so they could take revenge. Our stand against violence put us in harm's way. We were forced to leave my husband's village and resettle our family on my own tribe's land, in what is now Jiwaka province.*

*During my marriage, my husband and his community pressured me to give birth to a son, especially after I had given birth to five daughters. My sixth and last child was, finally, a son. Thirteen years ago, my husband deserted me and our six children, who I then raised as a single mother, working as an agricultural officer and teacher. Through my work I came to know there are too many women like me, who need information and guidance to ensure access to justice, to empower themselves to achieve financial independence and provide for their children. To begin to address women's needs and create a better society for them in 1996 I started a local women's rights NGO called Voice4Change (VfC).*

*I am the proud mother of five beautiful daughters who I have raised to be safe, strong and secure – to be who they want to be and to become financially independent. They have played an integral part of VfC's journey – its development and growth, challenges and achievements. My daughters have always helped since they were small, and are now part of our team and, with their peers, will shape the future of Jiwaka's women and girls'.*

*Lilly Be'Soer, personal account*

## Protecting women's rights

It has taken the government of PNG almost four decades to translate the basic rights of citizens into policies, laws and strategies. It was not until the 2000s that PNG pushed law reform efforts that promote gender equality through parliament. PNG has now updated and expanded the definition of rape; criminalised marital rape through amendments to the Criminal Code (2003); established the Family Protection Act of 2013 which improves access to justice and the protection and support for victims of domestic and family violence; and more recently, criminalised the act of alleging a person is practicing sorcery thereby exposing the 'accused' to extrajudicial judgement and cruel and inhuman treatment. Effective implementation of these laws is not yet guaranteed.

Family Support Centres in hospitals and Family and Sexual Violence Units in police stations that were initiated by NGOs in Morobe, Simbu and the National Capital District in the early 2000s, are now mandatory across PNG. The refinement of policies, protocols and procedures has been supported by multilateral and bilateral development partners, mainly the United Nations and the Government of Australia, but the quality of policies remains uneven across PNG's 22 provinces.

## Accountability for women's and children's safety

PNG's ten year National Strategy to prevent and respond to Gender Based Violence (GBV) (2016–25) forces accountability on provincial governments to prioritise, plan and adequately budget for better coordinated multisector action towards ending violence against women. Halfway into the strategy's implementation timeframe, only the National Capital District has developed and funded its own strategy. The Governor of National Capital District, together with the UN in PNG, has launched a campaign to convince the

governors of all provinces that ending violence against women and girls must be a priority in provincial development planning and budgeting.

International NGOs have supported some local NGOs working to promote gender equality, but too often these partnerships are confined to channeling funds to a selective few partner agencies rather than working to grow a provincial or national movement. The few resources that trickle down to local GBV organisations and services are extremely limited.

In a number of PNG's provinces, the contribution of local civil society has been very important – particularly in adopting a rights-based and just gender approach to local level GBV prevention and response. NGOs in the Eastern Highlands, East New Britain and East Sepik provinces, for example, established initiatives and services to end violence against women well before PNG reformed its laws to address Violence Against Women (VAW). With very minimal resources, they have designed and delivered campaigns to shift community norms and have also trained traditional and elected community leaders as well as the police, village court personnel and key staff of the responsible government agencies.

## The challenge to end violence in the Highlands region

PNG's limited, available data suggests that GBV is more common and severe across the Highlands region and worse where there is enduring tribal conflict. PNG's Highlands region was only opened up to colonial administration and the establishment of health and education services in the 1950s, just 25 years before PNG gained independence in 1975. Initially, PNG's slow shift towards norms and laws to promote gender equality and an end to violence against women and girls had less impact on the enduring patriarchal traditions of the Highlands region.

By the mid-1990s, Simbu and the Eastern Highlands provinces had established strong local women's rights organisations and links with Pacific regional and global feminist movements and networks. In the 'new' province of Jiwaka, the local NGO, VfC, has helped the local population catch up with rights-based initiatives to end VAW similar to Simbu and Eastern Highlands provinces. Together these three provinces have established a Highlands regional network of women human rights defenders – a groundbreaking and unique inter-provincial movement to protect women's rights. The network's impact on improving the security of women and girls is largely limited to three of a total seven provinces in the Highlands region that despite their wealth from extractive industries lag far behind in protecting women and girls from violence. Resource wealth has not translated into a better deal for women (Cox 2019).

### **The status and security of women in Jiwaka**

In Jiwaka, as in all other Highlands provinces, women are expected to allocate their labour and earnings to the needs of their family and tribe. Most women feel compelled to work hard continuously contributing their time, food and money to meet the many cultural and social obligations in the expectation that this will guarantee their safety and security.

A woman perceived to be obedient and ready to support her male relatives in fulfilling their social and customary obligations is allocated land to cultivate crops. She can use this land freely while her biological father is still living. But if her father dies, in most cases she can lose the right to use the land as the land technically belongs to the men in her family.

Independent incomes and control over their own earnings are vital to women's choices, empowerment and security. Jiwakan women's incomes are earned mainly through the production and sale of fresh produce at the local markets. Fresh food trading at local markets makes up the bulk of the Highlands region's informal economic activity and income and most households depend heavily on incomes women earn through informal trade. Women who are denied access to land have to earn cash by buying from other women farmers/producers to resell in local markets. During the recent COVID-19 lockdown and the closure of markets, all women traders were severely impacted with resellers the hardest hit. Their livelihood was stopped and their children went hungry.

The most serious security issue faced by women and girls in Jiwaka is the violence that results from patriarchal norms that undervalue their labour and productivity and deny them full citizenship and fundamental human rights. Entrenched beliefs regarding women's inferiority normalise many different forms of violence against them. Women and girls' fear of violence is a pervasive, ongoing problem that undermines their daily security and wellbeing.

The most terrifying experience for women in Jiwaka is the violence that results from being labelled a practicing sorcerer. Sorcery Accusation Related Violence (SARV) frequently occurs in Jiwaka and other provinces of the

Highlands region. Sorcery allegations are most often intentionally fabricated by the accusers motivated by revenge or wanting to deflect blame from themselves or coveting a vulnerable woman's land or property. The consequences, in their mildest forms, of alleging that a woman, and less frequently a man, is practicing sorcery are stigma, exclusion and banishment. But these days, SARV more frequently leads to abduction, public mob trials, and torture that is barbaric, sexualised and often fatal. Conducted mostly with impunity, these violent actions send a chilling message to all women and girls about their ongoing vulnerability. PNG law now criminalises persons who accuse others of practicing sorcery, but law enforcement and justice are too often far away, under-resourced and ambivalent about any intervention to rescue innocent women and girls.

PNG has yet to develop accurate, updated national and provincial data and trends on VAW. In Jiwaka, leading advocates and practitioners believe that women are increasingly dying at the hands of their partner or the extra-judicial, mob actions of their communities.

When a woman is the victim of violence or threats, the solidarity and support of male members of her family can make a difference. If she has the strong and committed support of men in her immediate family, she is more likely to seek justice and successfully navigate each long and difficult step towards achieving a positive outcome. But the support of kin is not always guaranteed.

### **Jiwaka's home-grown organisation for change**

VfC was established in 1996 to focus on Women's Economic Empowerment and to strengthen women's food crop production and 'own account' management. By 2004, the organisation's leaders realised that programs to end violence against women and address violent conflict between tribes must be implemented parallel to Women's Economic Empowerment programs.

In 2013, VfC applied and won a highly competitive, three-year UN Trust Fund grant to end VAW. VfC was one of just 11 successful organisations out of total of more than 2000 applications. The grant enabled community outreach to inform and educate people on the importance of working towards the achievement of equality and peace as integral parts of building a prosperous new province. In 2020, VfC has worked mainly across the North and the South Waghi Districts of Jiwaka Province, engaging with communities in 32 council ward areas through their respective elected councillors (ward members). VfC's Livelihoods Program has been directly working with women farmers to boost their agricultural production, to find markets and to gain control over their own incomes.

VfC has also developed a program for young women, so that they know their rights and can develop their social, economic and political potential. In 2016, VfC surveyed more than 1000 girls in Jiwaka who were not attending school. Eighty per cent of the 1300 girls surveyed lacked the financial support needed to pay their school fees as well as emotional support. When they don't make it to grade 11

they are labelled as failures, stigmatised and obliged to work hard to support their self-supporting mothers.

Some young women are forced to get married. Families assume that the young woman will ultimately 'belong to another man' through marriage and will move to the husband's place and work on his land. She will be told 'yu blo narepela man' (you belong to another man); as if to affirm that she has no long-term status or belonging in her birthplace.

Access to markets is an ongoing challenge for Jiwakan women – most of whom are farmers in rural communities. A lack of proper market infrastructure and reliable roads to remote, rural areas severely undermines women's opportunities to earn sufficient income to support their families. VfC's livelihoods program includes an informal savings and loans scheme that husbands and brothers cannot appropriate. With independent financial resources, women are more able to access justice including paying village court officials to hear their complaints about spousal violence, and – as is often demanded – for the woman to repay her 'brideprice' paid by the groom at their wedding in order to secure a divorce.

## Gender-based violence response desks

VfC initially focused on the prevention of VAW, but when women and their families became aware of their human rights and the existence of state laws to protect them from violence, there was an overwhelming demand for hospital and police-based services for survivors, as well as complementary paralegal, crisis counselling and safehouse services.

VfC has established three GBV Response Desks, two in South Waghi District and one in North Waghi, to provide GBV survivors with paralegal services, referrals to the police and courts, emergency and long-term crisis-counselling and local safe house emergency accommodation. VfC has also piloted a safe house project in one community where women and girls seeking safety and security during periods of family or community conflict find solace and comfort, have access to an on-site counsellor, and health care is available through a partnership with a large and well-run mission hospital.

Women and girls who present at the GBV Response Desks are rapidly assessed to ensure their safety but the safety of survivors and staff navigating what can be a slow-moving referral pathway is an ongoing challenge that requires courage and resilience on behalf of clients and staff alike. Many women lack the familial support needed to see justice through to fruition and are often forced by their family to withdraw complaints against their perpetrators. VfC staff accompany survivors to the court, where they are often exposed to verbal abuse and threats from perpetrators and their supporters.

## Community action

Leaders in three communities have translated national commitments to end GBV into community action. The Warawau, Jima and Dambex communities have adopted

bylaws that have proved effective in local VAW prevention and response and that align well with the relevant constitutional principles and state VAW laws of PNG.

Independent reviews and evaluations of VfC's programs have confirmed that people feel ownership of, and commitment to, their community VAW bylaws, which they have developed over a long period of inclusive community education and consultation with members. While many challenges remain, there is definitely great improvement in the attitudes and behaviour of many men and boys towards women and girls in their communities.

VfC has used its links with Pacific NGO networks to sponsor intensive training for Jiwaka's police and health workers to help them better understand gender equality and deepen their commitment in making safety nets effective for Jiwaka's for women and girls.

VfC draws most of its support from the local community, regional networks of women's rights organisations and a few international development organisations that have enabled institutional strengthening. The group has benefited from being part of a Pacific network of organisations working to end violence against women, coordinated by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre.

VfC has also enjoyed many years of financial and technical support from international development agencies, including the International Women's Development Agency where we enjoyed a beneficial, six-year partnership. From its original small, thatched roundhouse office, VfC has grown into a campus for residential training on women's rights and ending VAW.

## Conclusion

Many PNG women still lack information and support across all key sectors affecting their lives. They need more information on health, markets and business development. Too many women still lack access to justice. PNG laws to prevent violence against women and girls exist but ensuring police protection and access to justice are still extremely challenging for all and especially for remote, rural women.

PNG's National GBV strategy obligates the provincial government to develop its provincial plan and budget but in reality, VfC is the *de facto* lead implementer. VfC programs and services are doing much to prevent conflict and violence in contemporary Jiwaka province. They make a significant difference to gender equality, development and peace and also have much to give to other Highlands provinces such as Hela, where large scale oil and gas industries have exacerbated conflict and violence and neglected to support the formation of a home grown women's rights organisation (Cox 2019).

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# Land and social security in Samoa

*Penelope Schoeffel, Tiffany Arthur and Malama Meleisea, National University of Samoa*

## Introduction

Remittance behaviour among overseas Samoans and ceremonial contributions by most Samoans to major family occasions, can, to a large extent, be understood as a security measure. We argue that Samoans perceive their customary land as a social safety net, rather than an economic asset. Remittances secure their rights in family land and in the village to which the land belongs and, we suggest, the value of customary land to customary owners has less to do with its importance for economic development as proposed by the government of Samoa and its development partners – and more to do with the way in which customary lands, and the villages and chiefly titles those lands belong to, uphold personal and family identities and a sense of social security for Samoans at home and abroad. Thus a significant motivation among overseas Samoans who remit money to help support their village families and traditional obligations is that those families are their ‘place-holders’ in villages throughout Samoa. Remittances are the primary means to affirm and secure the rights of Samoan migrants to their social identities and to a place of belonging (*fa’asinomaga*).

Samoa comprises eight islands totalling a land area of 2830 square kilometres (1093 square miles), with a local population almost exclusively concentrated on the two bigger islands of Upolu and Savai’i. Samoa’s population is approximately 200,000, mainly indigenous Polynesians. Samoa’s diaspora greatly exceeds its resident population – with 182,721 people identifying themselves as Samoan in New Zealand in 2018 and in 2011 55,849 people in Australia identifying themselves as being of Samoan ancestry. In 2012, there were 180,000 people of Samoan descent in the USA, including people from the territory of American Samoa. In total it is estimated there are 417,849 overseas Samoans, at least 300,000 of whom originate from independent Samoa. All persons of Samoan ancestry are eligible to become citizens of Samoa.

Before the impact of COVID-19 the nominal GDP was \$US844 million – and expected to grow by three per cent in 2020. Tourism was an expanding sector accounting for 25 per cent of GDP in 2019 (ADB 2019). Like other Pacific island countries, Samoa is highly vulnerable to natural disasters and other economic shocks. The latest Human Development Index ranked Samoa at the low end of ‘high human development’ with an overall ranking of 111 out of 164 countries (UNDP 2019). In 2017, Samoa had an annual remittance inflow of \$US 40 million and in 2018 remittances contributed to 16.4 per cent of the GDP (Connell 2015).

## Land tenure

Around 80 per cent of land in Samoa is under customary tenure although most of the first class agricultural lowlands were alienated 150 years ago, leaving the rockiest land, hinterland forests and steep mountains as village land for

use of constituent ‘aiga (extended family) and *matai* (extended family chief). Throughout the 19th century, political conflicts in Samoa were magnified by the arrival of relatively large numbers of foreigners who became entangled in the historic rivalries between the traditional political factions for supremacy over leadership (see Gilson 1970 for a detailed history of this period). By the 1850s foreign settlers had begun to acquire land, and during the intermittent civil wars over the next 40 years warring factions sold parcels of land in exchange for guns, cash and other goods. By the 1880s land claims by foreigners amounted to about twice the area of the whole country, as Samoan leaders had sold the same areas of land to many foreign buyers (Meleisea 1987). The dubious nature of many land transactions and the massive extent of land claimed by foreigners led to the establishment of a Land Commission under the General Act signed at Berlin in 1889, comprising members nominated by each of the three powers with claims in Samoa – Germany, United States of America and Great Britain. The Commission dismissed most of the land claims, but validated others – notably the extensive claims by the German Planation Company.

After independence in 1961, Samoa’s constitution established that Samoan land cannot be sold or mortgaged in accordance to Article 101 (2), but it has been possible to lease customary land under the Alienation of Customary Land Act 1965. About 80 per cent of the total land area of Samoa including most village land remains under customary tenure. Only 14 per cent of land is classified as ‘first class agricultural’ land (Ward and Ashcroft 1998:22–25) most of which is government or privately owned. Customary land usually includes steep forested mountains and gullies, lava fields, and hilly, stony, but cultivable land. Land boundaries are mostly unregistered and *matai*, families and villages decide on who has authority over, and the rights to use, land.

Disputes regarding customary land or land boundaries, as well as appointment of *matai* or succession to *matai* titles, are extremely common and dealt with by the Land and Titles Court which remains much as it was since first established by the German colonial administration in 1903 (Meleisea and Schoeffel 2016). Research by O’Meara (1995) demonstrates clearly that customary land tenure no longer conforms to the principles that prevailed in the 19th century. Under prevailing customs in the precolonial period until the late 19th century, the highest ranking chiefs of large lineages allocated and re-allocated user rights to land and retained authority over the land regardless of who was actually using it. This flexible system both upheld the importance of the high chiefs and made sure everyone had access to resources according to their needs – well suited to a subsistence economy. O’Meara’s (1995) detailed research and our own observations show that although most Samoans, including overseas Samoans, believe this system still prevails, but people’s actual beliefs and behaviour often

do not match those principles. Most people believe the customary land they occupy is the property of their immediate family – often a nuclear family – and consider only children of present landholders will inherit user rights to the land. Claims to land by individuals and their immediate family is visibly demonstrated by the trend in villages for people to fence off not only agricultural land but also residential areas of land with chain wire fences and gates. Another device for the assertion of individual property rights is the location of graves. It is not unusual to see a grave or two located right in the middle of an area of unoccupied land, signaling that the land is thought to belong exclusively to the immediate descendants of the person or persons buried there (Meleisea and Schoeffel 2016). This can create uncertainty about land security and raise social tensions.

### Socioeconomic trends in villages

A recent study suggests there has been little increase in agricultural production or population growth in rural villages since the 1960s despite substantial population growth nationally and among Samoa's diaspora. In 2018–19, Arthur (2020) collected data on four villages in Samoa – Poutasi, Uafato, Taga and Utuali'i – to make a detailed comparison of the same villages in the 1960s (Lockwood 1971). Arthur found that the increasing integration with the market economy over time expected by Lockwood had not occurred and agriculture has actually declined, with very few families producing for the market. The 2015 Agricultural Survey found that of approximately 28,000 households in Samoa only 1045 engaged in agricultural production largely for sale, but most grew some subsistence crops (Samoan Agricultural Survey 2015), providing a degree of social resilience in the face of disasters and economic downturns.

Village agriculture has problems with disease and damage from pigs, but also from on-going cycles of over-production, particularly of taro when the market is flooded, and shortage when farmers, who have not achieved the profits expected, stop planting. Prices then rise, there is replanting, then over production once again and prices fall. Even crops for which there is a steady demand and good prices, such as premium variety cocoa, are affected by the desire among village people for a steady, predictable income comparable to wages rather than comparatively large seasonal payouts. Meleisea-Ainuu and Schoeffel (2016) cite examples of cocoa growing smallholders who could easily sell their whole harvest to an exporter for a good price in a lump-sum, but refuse to do so, processing cocoa beans and hoarding them to sell weekly in small amounts for making *kokosamoa* – cocoa paste used to make a popular beverage. This earns much more than selling the whole harvest. Some cocoa growers, who don't rely on cocoa income, hoard their processed beans until just before the new harvesting season when the shortage of cocoa at that time means they can ask twice the usual price.

As shown in the 2016 census (Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2017) there has been only minor growth in the rural population of rural Upolu and the island of Savai'i

over the past 50 years except in the villages in northwest Upolu which are closest to the urban area of Apia where the population has increased. Internal migration is facilitated by the flexible kinship system that allows people to relocate to other villages if they have relatives there and are willing to contribute labour or wages. In the absence of social protections, this provides a social safety net.

### Contemporary debates on the security of customary land

Since the 1990s the Government of Samoa – encouraged by the Asian Development Bank and neoliberal reformists – has characterised customary land tenure as an obstacle to rural development. Less than half of Samoans in Samoa live in villages or depend on customary land for their livelihood, however, most identify with one or more ancestral villages and their extended family wherever they are living. They believe they have rights to land if they return to live with their kinsfolk in one of their ancestral villages. This is one of the underlying reasons for *matai* title splitting – bestowing the same *matai* title on two or more or many, in some cases hundreds, of holders. By constitutional guarantee, customary land cannot be sold and therefore cannot be mortgaged, but the Alienation of Customary Land Act 1965 made it possible to lease land. Non-citizens may not own freehold land or hold leases on customary land without special permission. The most recent legislation providing for leasing of customary land are the Land Titles Re-registration Act 2008 and the Customary Land Advisory Commission Act 2013 which have been met by fierce opposition from NGOs and Samoan scholars at home and abroad (see for example Iati 2016). The Asian Development Bank (ADB) supported a technical assistance project for 'Promoting Economic Use of Customary Land' (ADB 2017). Under this project measures have been taken to improve means to alter the customary land-leasing framework and to set up a database of leased and leasable land, with the aim of developing a registry of all customary land. These measures allow for the possibility of leasing land to non-citizens as well as to citizens. This has triggered concerns aired in local newspapers about defending the customary land tenure system, and anxieties that foreigners are somehow being empowered to take it away from Samoans. A group of concerned *matai* protested to the ADB about the project, particularly about insufficient consultations on proposed changes to land laws. Journalist and newspaper editor Mata'fa Keni Lesa quotes from the concerns the *matai* raised:

Land in Samoan culture is regarded as an inheritance from God and connected intimately to the *matai* system. ... The fear is that if land is lost so will the *matai* system, hence also the culture of Samoa (PIDP 2015).

Inclusive Development International (IDI), a California-based NGO, backed these concerns and assisted the *matai* to direct complaints to the Asian Development Bank's office for accountability and legal matters. The issue is also being raised again by politicians standing against the governing party in the forthcoming 2021 national elections.



One of the problems in enabling easier leasing of customary land is the question of who has the authority to sign leases of customary land for commercial purposes. In July 2012, the Samoa Law Reform Commission (SLRC) circulated a discussion paper ‘*Pule a le Matai Sa’o*’ (authority of the principal chief) for public consultations. The paper was based on research on Samoan custom and usage and records of the Land and Titles Court (Meleisea 2017). A *matai sa’o* is the head of a family possessing authority over members including other holders of titles belonging to that family. The *matai sa’o* is also the principal custodian of the customary land appurtenant to his or her title. A *matai sa’o* may accordingly authorise a lease on a portion of customary land appurtenant to his title on behalf of his ‘*aiga* and the heirs of his or her title. The discussion paper presented nine questions about the authority of the *matai sa’o*, regarding his or her duties and authority; the criteria for appointment of a *matai sa’o*; the issue of authority when there are multiple holders of the *matai* title; the authority of the village *fono* in relation to the authority of a *matai sa’o*; the kind of disputes that arise between a *matai sa’o* and the heirs to the title he or she holds, and the service due to a *matai sa’o* by his ‘*aiga*. The discussion paper also sets out the legislative and practice background of the Samoa Land and Titles Court. After public consultation in October and November 2016, the SLRC produced a final report (Samoa Law Reform Commission February, 2017). The report made ten tentative recommendations on minimum qualifications for a person to be recognised as *matai sa’o* – suggesting these might be set out in law – or at least influence policy and practices of government agencies in dealings with Samoan customary matters. Of particular relevance is the proposal for a legal residential requirement in appointing a *matai sa’o* – that he or she should have resided in Samoa for a least a year prior to appointment, and thereafter reside in Samoa for at least one third of each year. Of the 700 people who participated in the consultations, the majority agreed that residence in Samoa was an important responsibility of a *matai sa’o*.

## Constitutional amendments and Samoan custom

The matter appears to have now been rolled into three interconnected bills currently before parliament – the Land and Titles Bill 2020, the Constitution Amendment Bill 2020 and Judicature Bill 2020. These were passed into law by Samoa’s current one-party government in December 2020 after much controversy, including the resignation of the Deputy Prime Minister, Fiame Naomi Mata’afa, who opposed the legislation. The first will replace the current Land and Titles Act 1981, and the second and third remove the Land and Titles Court from under its present constitutional umbrella. The new Land and Titles Court thus created will have added powers for adjudicating on village laws passed by village councils – as well as on customary land and *matai* titles. The court will have its own appeal structure, separate from the Supreme Court. These structures promise Samoa that – 58 years after independence – a new Court will give Samoan customs a rightful place in law.

The Explanatory Memorandum to the Constitution Amendment Bill 2020 poses this question:

Why is the Samoan Constitution more protective of the introduced modern principles such as individual rights, as compared to the Samoan custom and usages, the way of life of the Samoan people? In a courtroom, why are individual rights more powerful than Village *Fono* decisions? The answer is, because the Constitution says so.

This presents an emotional appeal from the government that by changing the Constitution they are upholding Samoan customs which might be denied by the Constitution, which Prime Minister Tuilaepa has said on many occasions, was written by foreigners and addresses Samoan custom in only four Articles (100–104). The two Samoan institutions addressed in the Constitution are customary land and *matai* titles – specified because of the assumption that these institutions, like foundation stones, would be long-lasting, whereas customs were not specified because they may change over time, as they do in all societies. Samoan custom has never been codified. The architects of Samoa’s Constitution undoubtedly believed that customs would evolve, the Samoans would muddle through, and eventually a new consensus would emerge about what is customary.

In founding the Land and Titles Commission (later Court) in 1903, German colonial officials wanted to prevent the endemic feuds and civil wars of the past by weakening the customary authority of adversarial high chiefs and their supporters. Over the 51 years since independence there has been no attempt to establish a set of principles for making decisions regarding disputes over customary land that could enhance land and social security. Assuming all Samoans know their customs and culture, the Land and Titles Court makes decisions on the basis of undefined, possibly arbitrary, and often contrary, principles, depending on the opinions of those on the Bench. However, as a Court of Records, the judges usually uphold previous court decisions in relation to a particular title, area of land, or land boundary. Other than this, the Land and Titles Court has no formal principles to fall back on when making decisions on the relative rights of those living on and utilising land and others who assert rights to it through a split title, or a common ancestor, or relative rights to land between members of a land owning family living in Samoa and those living overseas.

The Constitution contained ten provisions for the protection of ‘fundamental rights’ (Articles 5–15): the right to life; right to personal liberty; freedom from inhuman treatment; freedom from forced labour; right to a fair trial; rights concerning criminal law; freedom of religion, rights concerning religious instruction; rights regarding freedom of speech, assembly, association, movement and residence; rights regarding property; and freedom from discriminatory legislation.

The new laws have raised many questions in public discourse on Facebook and in local media. What Samoan customs will the proposed constitutional amendments preserve or protect? What will the establishment of a new

Land and Titles Court separated from the current judicial system achieve? There has been considerable pushback against the proposed legislation by the Samoa Law Society (see Ey 2020, Meleisea and Schoeffel 2020). Legal opinion criticising the Bills argues that if a separate parallel legal system for customary law is established, it may remove constitutional protections and open the way for village councils of chiefs (*fono*) to act despotically. We should add, however, that in Samoa's current one party parliament these Bills will soon become law.

## Conclusion

Since the 19th century there has been an idea that Samoa is economically underdeveloped because of its customary land tenure. The most recent manifestation of this idea has been the aforementioned ADB project 'Promoting Economic Use of Customary Land', which, with resulting legislation, provides easier pathways to leasing such land, which seem to be the government's unspoken agenda in passing the three new laws. We believe that the evidence of the past 50 years shows small scale commercial agriculture on customary land has not been favoured as an economic option by most Samoans on the basis of economic calculations rather than obstacles of custom. This is demonstrated by the four villages briefly described in this paper. Samoans do not treasure their land because of its economic potential, although their land does present subsistence and minor income earning options for those who need it.

Land tenure is not an obstacle to rural development in Samoa. The obstacles are poor, rocky soil, pests and plant disease, climate disasters and low returns. Young men queue up for chances to pick fruit in New Zealand and Australia as seasonal workers, but have little interest in Samoan village agriculture because of these disincentives. There has, however, been rural development in Samoa. Despite low productivity, every village in Samoa has access to sealed roads, reasonably effective transportation services, telecommunications services, radio and television, and nearby education, health and police services – a situation resulting from an electoral system which favours village electorates and thus can strengthen some forms of social security.

As we have shown, less than half of the population of Samoa lives under customary authority, and village population and economic growth have stagnated over the past 50 years. Yet Samoans retain a deep attachment to their ancestral villages as part of their identity and security and to the idea that village based branches of their families have land they could live on if they wished. This is demonstrated by the flow of remittances and the strength of public debate at home and abroad on leasing customary land; proposed changes to chiefly title-holding rules; or changes to the Constitution and the Land and Titles Court. Another indicator of the depth of attachment to village, land and custom is the extent of traditional ceremonial activities, particularly funeral and title bestowals, which are conducted on a far more munificent scale today than in the past due to money from overseas. Many hundreds of Samoans dig deep into their pockets to contribute to such ceremonies, and those abroad who can afford to, fly home for them. There are thousands overseas

who finance and build village houses and churches they will probably never live in or use. Because a person is counted as family by giving and serving, recognition of their rights as family and as people belonging to a village is maintained. This is why thousands of overseas Samoans hold *matai* titles, even though they play no role in village government. The reason is security – the thought that whatever happens in town or abroad, a Samoan person who has served and contributed to their family and village has a place of belonging, a place to return to.

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## COVID-19, human security and the plight of informal settlements

*Paul Jones, The University of Sydney*

COVID-19 has emerged in the Pacific region not only as a health issue but as a potential security crisis for the most vulnerable. Residents living in informal settlements face innumerable security challenges in meeting and sustaining their basic needs, including securing access to land and housing, clean water, and adequate sanitation. In addition, many must mitigate health problems that arise from living on flood prone/marginal lands and dealing with natural disasters and climate change impacts. The pandemic has elevated residents' insecurities related to the quality of housing, land tenure, social protection systems, and maintaining livelihoods. In the short-term, this also includes the inability of residents to meet basic COVID-19 social distancing principles and access to clean running water.

Consequently, the COVID-19 pandemic will have a far-reaching impact on the lives and livelihoods of those most vulnerable in Pacific informal settlements, further delaying access to basic human rights. Key messages emerge; firstly, for communities living in dense informal settlements with limited access to clean water and formal healthcare, it is impossible to apply the World Health Organization (WHO) 'middle-class' preventive measures around hand washing, social distancing and other measures. Secondly, a surge in COVID-19 cases in the Pacific and globally will have its greatest impacts on those urban residents who are already disadvantaged given their already unequal access to health facilities, their existing tenuous health, lack of affordable and adequate housing, uncertain land tenure, lack of access to basic services, and reduced livelihoods. Thirdly, when considering the security of shelters for those in informal settlements, COVID-19 highlights the need for refocusing and supporting 'bottom-up' models of urban development and urban growth in the Pacific.

By the beginning of February 2021, 11 Pacific Island Countries (PICs), namely, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea (PNG), the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Wallis and Futuna recorded 23,014 positive cases of COVID-19 and 203 deaths (SPC 2020). While COVID-19 is of concern in all PICs, community transmission is a major risk in French Polynesia and Guam where cases continue to increase. As of early February 2021, reported cases in PNG continued to increase gradually with the virus having been reported in half of PNG's provinces. There remains a major fear of a significant outbreak in a country that is resource rich but has limited institutional, management and system capacity (McClure 2020). While in comparison to their Pacific neighbors, New Zealand and Australia, the number of recorded PIC COVID-19 cases are small, PICs have still implemented travel and tourism restrictions by closing borders, thus severely constraining international flights, cargo and tourist shipping. Solomon Islands is typical of many PICs, having shut down shops, bars and local markets, while youth impacted by school closures have migrated back to their home islands to ensure the security of their family networks and to access subsistence resources (Ride and Kekea 2020).

With limited testing capacity combined with poor infrastructure and management capacity, all PICs have enacted public health emergencies that have resulted in lockdowns, school closures, market closures, curfews, and social distancing to contain and limit COVID-19 transmission (Bruce 2020). Identified health risks include the lack of necessary laboratory equipment to undertake in-country testing. This presents a major challenge of access to care if the number of COVID cases spikes. At a broader level, the dramatic reduction in tourist arrivals plus impacts from reduced shipping, fishing and general trade disruption is having a major impact on the local economy and livelihoods (SPC 2020). There has been little attention given to those residents hit hardest by COVID-19 and its PIC towns and cities, a trend observed elsewhere in Asia (Jones 2020).

Figure 1: Attempts to close local markets such as those in Port Moresby and Suva have been problematic as they are fundamental to sustaining livelihoods and maintaining household cohesion.



Source: Paul Jones

With its high dependency on tourism, the Pacific has greatly suffered from border closures and lockdowns, with consequences spreading into the overall economy and impacting supply chains and job security (International Monetary Fund 2020). The contraction of local economies means many of the urban poor who are self-employed or running small-scale enterprises are struggling to maintain their livelihoods. Globally, declining employment is expected to reduce remittances by approximately 20 per cent. Excluding PNG, remittance flows in the PICs average approximately 10 per cent of GDP with major impacts likely to be felt in Tonga where remittances exceed 40 per cent of GDP compared to approximately 15 per cent in the Marshall Islands and Samoa (International Monetary Fund 2020). Seasonal workers from PICs unable to work in Australia and New Zealand due to border closures further impacts on workers and their remittance flows to families. Collectively, a reduction in remittances and country-to-country migration flows will contribute to weakening family cohesion and social networks, especially where existing ties are already fragile and under stress.

In addition, reduced economic activity and spending will have serious consequences on maintaining and improving PIC developmental outcomes including their ability to achieve the relevant UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 that calls for an end to poverty in all its manifestations by 2030, and SDG 11 which seeks the development of safe and sustainable cities. Given the nature of the global economy, it is becoming increasingly clear that PICs will continue to see increased economic and social disruptions generated from the decline in the trade and tourism industries.

In this setting, the COVID-19 pandemic will have a far-reaching impact on the urban poor living in dense and

overcrowded informal settlements. For example, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that people:

- clean their hands with water and soap or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser;
- maintain at least a one meter physical distance from other persons; and
- avoid contact with eyes, nose and mouths to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (WHO 2020).

It is impossible for residents of informal settlements to apply these 'middle-class' preventive measures given that they have limited access to clean water and are constrained in physical living conditions in terms of both their dwelling size and surrounding open space. Population density combined with shared water standpipes and toilets loom as major sites of transmission. Many residents also have limited financial resources to consistently fund hand sanitisers and masks, assuming they are available. In this setting, access to soap-based products and good hygiene practices are equally important in fighting COVID-19 (Lal, Lucas and Slatyer, 2020).

### The Impact of COVID-19 on the security of informal settlements

With over 95 per cent of the total global cases of COVID-19 concentrated in urban areas, the pandemic will have its greatest impact in poor, underserved and densely populated urban areas, namely, informal settlements and slums which are estimated to account for approximately one billion residents (UN-Habitat 2020a). The residents living in these areas include rural-urban migrants, refugees, and the displaced. A 2016 Asian Development Bank (ADB) assessment



indicated several key features relevant to the status of informal settlements and the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Firstly, the report indicated that in 2012, some 800,000–1,000,000 Pacific urban residents lived in informal and squatter settlements, as well as native and traditional villages, and that by the end of 2015, this number would increase to more than one million residents. In the absence of formal baseline data on slums and squatter settlements compiled at PIC national and regional levels, and noting the continued upward trajectory of urban growth and informal settlements in the Melanesian capitals of Port Moresby, Honiara, Port Vila, and Suva as examples, an estimate of two million residents living in some form of urban village is not an unreasonable benchmark.

Secondly, all PIC towns and cities contain to varying degrees a mix of urban villages plus formal development,

with the largest number of informal settlements located in Port Moresby where over 50 per cent of the population lives in some type of informal urban village (Jones, 2016).

Thirdly, the report discussed opportunities to address the growing scale and proportion of informal and squatter settlements (urban villages) given their increasing number, size and density in PICs. The assessment makes clear that it is urban residents who experience the greatest insecurities, being least able to access adequate land, housing, services and infrastructure in PIC towns and cities.

Finally, the report questions who constitutes the urban poor and disadvantaged, including who is increasingly moving into informal settlements to seek affordable land and housing and challenging both the typology and concept of what is an informal settlement and slum in the Pacific.

Figure 2: COVID-19 reporting in the Pacific will bring to the fore the neglected but critical data challenge of what comprises an informal settlement and who are the urban poor.



Source: Paul Jones



Unfortunately, little urban analytics and baseline data exists to understand the process of transformation and change to the Pacific urban fabric.

Whilst the impact of COVID-19 may differ across PICs, the underlying characteristics of PICs pose a major structural hurdle in dealing with COVID-19. These include the small size and proximity/remoteness of PICs; gaps in infrastructure provision, and institutional and system capacity, especially health systems and land administration systems; provision of basic services; existing health and workplace safety compliance; high economic vulnerability due to limited export base and a high dependence on imports; migration and flow of remittances; existing hardship and poverty with low formal social security safety nets; and high environmental vulnerability including climate change impacts. Whether large or small Pacific islands, these challenges are exacerbated by COVID-19 impacts and

the lack of security will be most visible for those living in informal settlements.

Despite these growing challenges, urban planning and management of PIC urbanisation remains weak and largely misunderstood and an absence of political will to act (Barbara and Keen 2015; Jones 2012). Planning approaches remain an inheritance of colonial times and Euro–American systems, with little appetite to develop coherent Pacific urban planning. Regional policy approaches are disconnected from national and city initiatives, resulting in good practice knowledge and contextual approaches of ‘what works’ not being shared. The misalignment of policy is exacerbated by planning approaches that fail to support the growing number of informal settlements (Jones, 2017). In this setting, the impact of COVID-19 on the social, economic and cultural dimensions of (1) water supply and sanitation, (2) housing and land, and (3) livelihoods, social

cohesion and community resilience, highlight the challenges residents and households face in accessing and sustaining basic goods, services and support and most importantly, their overall security.

**1. Water supply and sanitation:** The provision of potable water and clean sanitation facilities are important given that washing hands with a soap, sanitiser and clean water are the key tenets of the public health response. Confronting the needs of underserved populations in informal settlements, especially those who may share toilets and do not have their own water supply, becomes paramount in improving overall health security and seeking local solutions for COVID-19. Shared water stands, for example, presents risks for social distancing such as queuing for water and maintaining physical distance. Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) interventions are often considered purely physical interventions, often independent of their deeper public health role and implications. WASH services are critical elements in stopping COVID-19 transmission and maintaining public health in underserved informal settlements.

Most PICs do not have sufficient handwashing services and WASH interventions to improve public health outcomes have been limited to Suva, Fiji (Lal, Lucas and Slatyer, 2020). WASH services may be suspended or reduced in operational capacity, put on hold or deferred, or affected by a states of emergencies, school lockdowns, and border closures impacting those with existing insecurities the most. This impact will be further dependent on gender, social and kin dynamics, as well as general institutional capacity at state and local levels.

**2. Housing and land:** Residents living in informal settlements and slums where population densities are high are acutely vulnerable to contracting COVID-19 as they live in crowded conditions, lack direct household access to water and sanitation, and suffer from poor drainage and ventilation. Unlike housing in middle class urban environments where mono-functional rooms and spaces are often delineated by physical partitions, housing in informal settlements serves many functions including sleeping, cooking, eating, washing laundry and a place for general sociality, increasing the likelihood that they will be used by residents suffering from health issues as well as others in the residence.

The complexity of the spectrum of land tenure arrangements in PICs make it difficult to generalise about land tenure security as much of the response will be locally nuanced (see, for example, McEvoy, Mitchell and Trundle, 2019). Where cash or in-kind services are required to pay rent to secure ongoing land tenure arrangements or make mortgage payments, deferral of payments or renegotiation may be requested if residents are unable to meet timelines. From a COVID-19 perspective, securing rooms or housing for those required to isolate or facing eviction arises as a major challenge. It may be unachievable in the urban setting requiring a move back to their rural village and home islands. In this context, land emerges as a strong form of financial and social security for landowners, but as an insecurity for the lessee who may have no socio-cultural ties or connections to the traditional or communal lands on which they live.

Figure 3: Pre-existing land and financial issues will be compounded by COVID-19 if residents are unable to meet rent and mortgage payments.



Source: Paul Jones

Where population and housing density of settlements is high, the notion of what constitutes a household in informal settlements will be fluid as a single dwelling can contain more than one household as related residents move between houses and share food and sleeping spaces. Households may comprise the extended family including grandparents or the nuclear family. Thus, understanding the physical condition of the dwelling, the size of the house and composition of the household are also important in understanding household security and the potential implications from COVID-19. What these scenarios make clear is the tenuous trade-offs residents in informal settlements make on a day-to-day basis. In other words, residents are tasked with making a home that enables them to access urban jobs and educational opportunities, whilst accepting the underlying insecurity that may come with informal land and housing agreements that are not recognised by the formal system (Kiddle 2018).

**3. Livelihoods, social cohesion and community resilience:** While a small proportion of those living in informal settlements may work in government institutions or the private sector, the majority work in mini-stalls, operate small scale home based entities such as laundries, pre-school care or motor repairs, act as suppliers to markets (from household gardens), work as market vendors, or simply look after the household. COVID-19 in its most basic form attacks socio-cultural protocols by enforcing social and physical

distancing which impacts on the proximity amongst people who live and work in a particular social group and community. When mobility restrictions are fragmented or stopped, livelihoods and income streams will be hardest hit, challenging family and household stability and social cohesion. With limited or no access to formal social protection systems and networks, women who do the bulk of unpaid household work whilst engaging in small scale economic activities will take the brunt of the burden. In this context, COVID-19 will attack the four basic elements central to maintaining social cohesion in PICs. These are:

1. place attachment and development tied to ethnicity and kinship;
2. kin-based social organisation;
3. land tenure based on customary practices; and
4. the persistence of subsistence-based household activities, such as home gardening, necessary for food security and maintaining market orientated trade (Jones 2016).

With households and social settings in informal settlements at the forefront of experiencing the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, traditional governance, community decision-making, and support from informal social protection systems – as already seen in urban settings – will come strongly into play in the absence of limited impact from government formal systems. If these norms are not effective, the implications will include an upward trajectory in domestic violence, most notably in PNG which already displays some of the highest rates of sexual and family violence in the world (Bruce 2020).

Despite the weakening of the social organisation of informal settlements through urbanisation, informal social protection systems such as making space available for visiting relatives, minding school children from outer islands, sharing food derived from subsistence, and providing remittances and cash to support family members continues to underpin and bind family, household and clan solidarity helping constrain poverty levels, maintain access to basic goods and services, and keep health, income and socioeconomic inequalities at lower levels than what they would be without such systems.

## Conclusion

Security in the Pacific encompasses social protection and safety systems, gender discrimination and domestic violence, human rights, security of fishing rights and economic zones, and cyber and food security among many other issues.<sup>1</sup> At a national level, for example, in 2017, Solomon Islands became one of the first in the Pacific region to launch a *Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan, 2017–2021*, addressing women's rights and participation in maintaining security and advancing peace, and emphasising the States' responsibility for ending sexual and gender based conflict and discrimination.

At the local level, the COVID-19 crisis has revealed the depth of gaps in basic services and associated insecurities cutting across land, housing, and social protection systems facing the most vulnerable communities in informal

settlements. In PICs, the COVID-19 pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on households and communities that cannot secure access to potable water, hand cleansers, masks, and knowledge of personal hygiene, and cannot maintain physical distancing principles. These and other socio-economic inequalities are most prevalent in informal settlements, thus increasing the risk of disease transmission to the wider population.

While the exact levels of COVID-19 transmission in PICs are capped by low testing capacity, unreported cases, poor state of national 'disaster' response infrastructure and borders that are isolated due to distance, it is the impacts of COVID-19 on the socio-economic aspects of Pacific life that are deepening existing inequalities and insecurities in informal settlements. Despite the dearth of published baseline data on Pacific informal settlements, ongoing land and housing insecurities, the tenuous state of livelihoods, and low levels of access to basic services and social systems pervade urban areas. In this context, the spread of COVID-19 further constrains the 'informal' lifelines necessary to support livelihoods and maintain socio-cultural structures especially for those in informal settlements. This magnifies the inequalities and vulnerabilities in basic human rights, highlighting marginalisation, exclusion and gender inequality as well as exposing how reliant PICs have become on larger countries outside of the region for their economic survival.

More than ever, notions of security become an all-embracing concept, with COVID-19 highlighting again the need for revisiting models of urban development and urban growth in the Pacific. At the household level, security as expressed through the condition of physical shelter, land, basic services and social support systems, becomes all important in sustaining livelihoods, while at the neighbourhood level, it is reflected in the physical condition of homes and the social mix of communities that influences public perceptions of safety, law and order. How do we address the insecurities and fundamental issues of urban equity and inclusion when many PIC leaders will not address the harder issues of imbalanced resource allocation and transparency of governance? What do these mean in individual PIC contexts where accurate social data on the most vulnerable is missing, and lower education levels of residents often only increases the spread of misinformation? Collectively, these are all threats to human security in the Pacific region.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 crisis should be used as an opportunity to do things differently, focusing on improving living conditions, particularly housing, services and land tenure, whilst at the same time providing an opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved since the introduction of the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda (NUA). Central tenets of the potentially transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as adopted by the 193 United Nations member states in 2015 was to ensure 'no one will be left behind' and 'to reach the furthest behind first' In 2016, the NUA as adopted in Quito, Ecuador, confirmed 'no one will be left behind' as the leading principle in supporting implementation of the SDGs



and taking centre stage in renewed efforts to manage urbanisation. However, COVID-19 across PICS has exposed the problematic nature of implementing these ‘global to local’ principles in a period when the gap between the ‘haves and have nots’ is increasing.

In respect of the important role of WASH, only the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, and Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), have data on hygiene facilities and household handwashing. To achieve the objectives of the SDGs and other top down development imperatives, COVID-19 has exposed that ‘business as normal’ is not good enough. Inevitably, policies and programs will have more success if driven from the ‘bottom-up’ having relevance to community notions of security and their priority needs (land, housing, services, livelihoods) rather than imposed notions of what is best. Asking the key questions of ‘security for whom?’ as well as ‘security of what?’ will expose the deeper political and human dimensions of policies, including who is included and excluded in urban development processes (Jones 2016, 2017).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See, for example, *Development Bulletin No. 78* on ‘Urban Development in the Pacific,’ and section on Urban Security, 63–78.

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# Unsettled: Informal settlement living in the Pacific

Luke Kiddle, Victoria University, New Zealand

Informal settlements of the Global South are among the least prepared for the seismic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Corburn et al. 2020). Secure and adequate housing, safe water, toilets, sewers, drainage and waste collection are scarce or non-existent; space constraints and overcrowding make physical distancing and self-quarantine impractical and the rapid spread of infection more likely. Violence is often prevalent. Further, informal settlement residents, often reliant on precarious wage labour or the informal sector, are economically extremely vulnerable (Fèvre and Tacoli 2020). The tipping point into extreme poverty is easily reached (Ezeh et al. 2017).

## Settings

In the 1994 *Human Development Report* the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) broadened the notion of security from the protection of the state and its border by the military to the protection of individuals from a range of threats to wellbeing including chronic hunger, disease, repression, and other significant and hurtful disruptions (UNDP 1994). The 2012 adoption of General Assembly Resolution 66/290 was also a significant milestone in the global application of human security. In Resolution 66/290 the United Nations (UN) agreed that human security is an approach to identifying and addressing ‘widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihoods, and dignity of people’. Seven key types of insecurity were identified: economic, food, health, environment, personal, community, and political. The United Nations Human Security Framework also promoted three key ‘freedoms’:

- freedom from fear;
- freedom from want; and
- freedom to live in dignity (United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security 2016).

In our region, Pacific leaders have also welcomed a wider understanding of security, notably recognising climate change in the 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security as ‘the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific’ (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2018).

Pacific populations are increasingly concentrated in urban areas. For example, 2018 data show Micronesia was 69 per cent urban, Polynesia, 44 per cent and Melanesia, 19 per cent urban with Melanesian urban areas growing particularly quickly (UNESCAP 2019a) accompanied by a rapid growth of informal settlements. An estimated 20–45 per cent of those living in Melanesian capitals reside in informal settlements (PRIF 2015). Often located in coastal areas or on other environmentally marginal land such as steep hills and thus very vulnerable to storm events,

informal settlements are at the forefront of numerous coal-escing stresses on human security and wellbeing in the Pacific.

## Informal settlement health

A globally-focused literature review of the health of slum residents published in *The Lancet* in 2017 showed that, overall, people living in slums have much worse health than those living in non-slum urban areas, specifically:

- inadequate water supply, sanitation, drainage and waste collection in crowded environments predisposes residents to diarrhoea and diseases such as typhoid, cholera, and hookworm.
- children are especially vulnerable to diarrhoea, stunting, and impaired cognitive development given under-nutrition, low breastfeeding rates, and poor sanitation.
- reservoirs and vectors for infectious diseases flourish in slum environments.
- the typically cramped physical and social environment of slums exposes residents to harm from fire, extreme weather, and crime.

Overall, slum health has been neglected in the literature and warranted separate attention from urban health to assist in implementing particular slum related priorities in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and NUA (Ezeh et al. 2017).

## Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

In 2015, the World Bank, via the Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility (PRIF), published ‘Unsettled: Water and Sanitation in Urban Settlement Communities of the Pacific’, a synthesis of WASH in urban settlement communities of the Pacific, with a focus on Melanesia (World Bank 2015). While consolidated data is scarce, Melanesian informal settlements are poorly served with water, sanitation, electricity, waste management, drainage, and roads (PRIF 2015). Table 1 (next page), for example, shows urban water and sanitation access across the Melanesian capitals.

Utilities in Melanesia are often constrained by technical, financial, and legal barriers to serve informal settlements, largely because they do not have a clear obligation from central government to do so (PRIF 2015). In addition, where authorisation to deliver services does exist, utilities tend not to prioritise extending services, often due to greater technical, legal, and commercial challenges than serving formal communities (ibid). Furthermore, even when services are provided, settlement households may not have access to them due to unmet land tenure requirements, such as the need to show some evidence of occupation, financial constraints, or cultural norms. For example, rural migrants

Table 1: Urban water and sanitation access in urban Melanesia

	PNG	Solomon Islands	Vanuatu	Fiji
<b>Urban water access estimates (%)</b>				
Piped onto premises	55	61	51	96
Other improved source (public taps, standpipes, wells, boreholes, springs or collected rainwater)	33	32	47	4
Unimproved (unprotected well or spring, carted tank or drum, raw surface water, bottled water)	12	7	2	0
<b>Urban sanitation access estimates (%)</b>				
Improved facilities (sewers, septic, composting)	56	81	65	92
Shared facilities (2 or more households sharing a single facility)	9	n/a	33	4
Other improved (bucket or hanging latrines, no sanitary platform, no effective waste containment)	31	10	2	4
Open defecation	4	9	0	0

Source: Adapted from PRIF 2015 (2012 data)

may be accustomed to receiving water and possibly sanitation services without payment (ibid; Gooden 2017). Often a pragmatic approach to delivery of services is needed. As a state owned enterprise, Solomon Water, for example, is mandated to provide water to gazetted urban areas only. However, the utility has been providing some reticulated water to informal settlements in urban Honiara and peri-urban areas in Guadalcanal Province using a variety of approaches. These include reduced connection costs; community standpipes (with community water tariffs); prepaid 'cash water' trials; and campaigns to increase willingness to pay and reduce illegal connections and water theft that is common in informal settlements (ibid).

### Women in informal settlements

In Melanesia, it is women who bear primary responsibility for collecting water, cleaning, washing, cooking, and caring for children and the sick (PRIF 2015). Amnesty International profiled the burden and risks faced by women in Solomon Islands informal settlements, noting two major concerns: firstly, a lack of clean water and proper sanitation near homes, and secondly, a high prevalence of violence, particularly sexual violence, against women. Women face high rates of physical and sexual violence when they are crossing poorly lit settlements to collect water in the early morning and evening, bathing, or toileting at night. Amnesty International argued that informal settlement communities in Solomon Islands, and notably their women, were deprived of their fundamental rights to water and sanitation and subjected to a 'myriad of indignities'. 'Overall, it is very clear that women and girls are disproportionately impacted by poor water and sanitation services—an experience applicable across the Pacific region' (Amnesty International 2011; Munro and Carpenter 2016; PRIF 2015).

### Personal security

Data on personal security and crime rates in Pacific informal settlements are limited. World Bank research on trends in crime and violence in Papua New Guinea has shown how crime tends to be concentrated in urban areas, particularly Port Moresby and Lae. Data also show that significant proportions of crime involve violence, including the use of firearms. The World Bank research highlighted that certain parts of urban areas are 'hotspots' for crime and violence, yet evidence that crime and violence is concentrated in urban informal settlements is mixed. For example, the research noted that crime was also high in some affluent areas of Port Moresby (Lakhani and Willman 2014).

My research has shown that personal security was identified as a key concern for many informal settlers but it was notable that many respondents associated, and perhaps conflated, security of tenure with personal security. This conflation was particularly common for Indo-Fijian residents of informal settlements where personal security was frequently an overriding concern and housing investment often included making informal settlement 'plots' and dwellings more physically secure (Kiddle 2011).

[I feel insecure as] sometimes good, but sometimes drunken people cause the problem. And the thieves [sic], three times they broke my house and steal the things. (Indo-Fijian resident of Tomuka in Lautoka).

If we have developed land we can fence our area and put the burglar bar. The way we stay here anyone can be a *mataqali*<sup>1</sup> and threaten [us] to leave this place. As far as we are concerned if we have proper title we are secured. (Indo-Fijian resident of Caubati Topline in Nasinu, greater Suva) (ibid:224,230).

Khan (2010) has also documented that personal security is a major concern for female residents of Jittu Estate in central Suva, one of the oldest and most congested

informal settlements in Fiji. Indeed, language of insecurity, particularly for Indo-Fijians, is omnipresent in describing socio-political and everyday realities in Fiji (Pangerl 2007).

The view that informal settlements are ‘crime riddled’ is, however, problematic. Negative stereotypes of informal settlements and settlers persist across the Pacific. Goddard (2001:3), for example, writes that informal settlements in Papua New Guinea are often stereotyped through linked themes of ‘uncontrolled migration, unemployment, extreme poverty, and crime, characterising settlement populations as maladjusted and undesirable in urban society’. The imagery that Goddard and others argue does not reflect the true diversity of urban informal settlements (Barber 2003). In Papua New Guinea especially, these stereotypes, usually legitimised as part of a ‘war on crime’, have influenced, and been used for justification for, forced evictions from informal settlements (Koczberski et al. 2001). Construction ahead of big events in Papua New Guinea, such as the 2018 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit, has also seen the eviction of informal settlement communities, including approximately 3,000 settlers at Paga Hill to make way for hotels and the APEC meeting venue (CIVICUS 2018, Woods 2018). In other Pacific Nations there has been a history of informal settlement evictions. Fijian authorities, for example, frequently evicted informal settler communities prior to a change in government approach around the late 2000’s (Kiddle 2011).

## Climate change

Approximately 50 per cent of the Pacific’s population (7.5 million people), live in coastal settlements (UNESCAP 2019b). Climate change is bringing increased frequency and intensity of storm events. Pacific cities, where populations are increasingly concentrated, are at a growing risk as informal settlements in particular are often located upon marginal lands such as riverbanks, floodplains, accretion areas, and other coastal areas. The vulnerability of Pacific urban areas to climate related impacts, especially informal settlements, is intensified by non-durable housing, deficits in WASH and other critical infrastructure, and institutional capacity challenges influenced by weaknesses in governance and land use planning (Kiddle et al. 2017). Finally, in some Pacific nations a persistent rural bias remains, where the particular challenges of land management and planning in urban areas are ignored (ibid).

Urban vulnerability has been illustrated through a number of devastating storm events in recent years in the Pacific region. In Honiara, for example, where it is estimated that one in three households is within 500 metres of a river or coastline (Wilson 2018). All 24 fatalities in the 2014 floods were from informal settlements located on the banks of the Mataniko River in central Honiara. Thousands of people were displaced to evacuation centres across the city, and just weeks after the flood, informal settlements and evacuation centres experienced a spike in diarrhoea cases linked to the contagious rotavirus. Studies later showed that over 4000 people, and in some informal settlements, more than 50 per cent of children were affected. The outbreak

then spread to other areas of the country, with 27 fatalities recorded, most of whom were children under five years of age.<sup>2</sup> (ibid).

## Conclusion

Despite relatively scarce data, it is obvious that informal settlement living in the Pacific brings significant risk for residents. Climate vulnerability of informal settlements is acute. Informal settlement living also clearly brings health and personal safety risks, particularly for children and women. There is much to be done to meet the central tenet of the New Urban Agenda of ‘cities for all’ that are ‘just, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, resilient, and sustainable’ and the three freedoms of the United Nations Human Security Framework, particularly ‘freedom from fear’ and ‘freedom to live in dignity’.

The 2015 Pacific Urban Forum endorsed a Pacific Urban Agenda that notably aimed to comprehensively respond to the impacts of climate change in urban areas and enhance social equity (Kiddle et al. 2017). The subsequent Pacific Urban Forum in 2019 aimed to galvanise action and partnerships for implementation of the Pacific Urban Agenda, although much more than rhetoric is needed for pathways that drive real change (Keen and Kiddle 2019). Informal settlements are at the forefront of the challenge. More work is required to improve the climate resilience of informal settlements. Further, across the region, investment in WASH in informal settlements should be prioritised. Economies of scale and increasing returns on investment in often dense informal settlements are on offer (Lilford et al. 2017).

Some Pacific nations, particularly Papua New Guinea in recent years, are still forcibly evicting informal settlers from long established communities. However, global agencies such as UN-Habitat recommend pursuing alternatives such as less disruptive *in situ* settlement upgrading (Kiddle 2010). Upgrading involves a variety of responses including the provision of infrastructure, WASH improvements, and a range of mechanisms to increase security of tenure and thus promote housing investment (ibid). All upgrading responses are likely to increase resilience to climate change and other shocks such as COVID-19.

For many, living in an informal settlement does not bring the safety or dignity that the New Urban Agenda or the United Nations Human Security Framework envisage. Despite some focus on informal settlements from Pacific governments and development partners, much more needs to be done. In the Pacific, where the absolute numbers of informal settlers are not overwhelming, quick gains could be available through concerted, partnered efforts.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Land owning tribal group/unit. Sometimes used to refer to an individual.
- <sup>2</sup> Diarrhoeal diseases have become the fifth leading cause of death in Solomon Islands (Wilson 2018).

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# ***Oi Man Kam: Community Associations as part of inclusive urban governance in the urban South Pacific***

*Jennifer Day, The University of Melbourne*

Emerging governance structures of small, Pacific island capital cities are important because indigenous knowledge and practice present an alternative to dominant, Eurocentric ideas around which most of the world is now organised. Mobilising culture and indigeneity to challenge hegemonic ideas has become important all over the world (Escobar 2007; Freire 2005) and over-reliance on colonially-influenced social structures as instruments of governance discounts the possibility of allowing new ones to be integrated into governance processes.

Two institutions in Vanuatu seek recognition and legitimacy from both the State and the public: the first is a state creation, the *area council*; and the second is the *community*, which has a distinct identity from a village or an urban settlement and is currently seeking its own status as a unit of governance. Community associations like the Elang Etas Community Association (EECA) offer models that could be added to existing State-led additions to help make urban governance more inclusive. The EECA organises communities of around 2800 people as a way of seeking to avoid eviction from land disputes. At the end of 2019, there were more than 70 evictions planned in metropolitan Port Vila, with another 30 in the remainder of the country (Personal communication with the Sheriff's Office, December 2019). Some of these have been delayed because of COVID-19, but these delays have not resolved the underlying land disputes. If Vanuatu wishes to avoid urban conflict like that experienced in Honiara in Solomon Islands (Foukona 2015), it must find ways to resolve land disputes, accommodate urbanisation, and foster a sense of belonging (Day and Bamforth 2020) in new, urban migrants. New governance structures such as EECA could be considered along with state-driven structures such as area councils, as a possible model. This paper is the result of sustained engagement with EECA and the Elang Etas community since EECA's founding in 2018.

## **Background: Informality and city identity**

Vanuatu is a democratic republic, founded in 1980 after a colonial period (1906–80) where it was jointly governed by France and Britain under the name, New Hebrides. The post-colonial environment of the capital, Port Vila, has blurred the distinctions between city and village confusing outsiders and locals alike that seek to understand where settlements sit on a continuum of formality. Port Vila continues to be characterised as a city of villages, or a 'village city' (Jones 2011); an urban fabric characterised by groups of people reproducing ethnic enclaves of village life in an urban area. The distinction between formal and informal is another problem that appears in a distinct way in this setting where *kastom*, or traditional culture, is enshrined in the identity and founding constitution of the state.

In Port Vila, the persistent link between the city and the village is underscored by the encirclement of the city by villages, and the functional and administrative inclusion of some villages into the metropolitan area. Around Port Vila, the established peri-urban villages were originally composed of the kin groups that were present in the area that become Port Vila: Pango; Eratap; Erakor; Ifira, and Mele (Rawlings 1999). Attempts to create typologies of Pacific settlement types consistently miss or misunderstand some types of communities that are outside these villages. One Asian Development Bank report (Jones 2016), for instance, lays out a typology that includes traditional villages, squatter settlements, informal settlements, and planned settlements – missing the non-village, non-squatter, communities that are growing rapidly and outside the planning structures that govern the area within the Port Vila municipal boundary. Including these communities in planning is important, given the proportion of people that live on customary lands in Port Vila (around 27,000,<sup>1</sup>) the proportion of the peri-urban population in *communities* (at least 25 per cent), and the rapid growth of these settlements (up to 12 per cent annually (Jones and Sanderson 2017)).

In contemporary Vanuatu, the authority of chiefs is still highly relevant to social life. Chiefly authority was central to the construction of the independent state (Bolton 1999; Martin 2019), and chiefs are called upon to manage all matters of land and custom in Vanuatu. They are often declared the representatives of communities in determinations of rightful land ownership in customary and introduced legal proceedings, (e.g., Smith 2017). Importantly, chiefs continue to be called upon by the current government and social structures to provide leadership in new state structures, such as area councils.

## **The current governance structure: Area councils**

One local structure of governance that has recently begun to assert more authority in matters of local regulation is area councils. Area councils are structures of the State that leverage Pacific respect for chiefly authority (Wairiu 2006). Established by an act of Parliament in 2003 (Government of Vanuatu 2003), area councils have been slowly mobilised as a form of local government. In 2015, at the official opening of the Eratap Area Council office, Shefa Province President Edward George noted that the:

Eratap Area Council Office represents a 'small government' for the people of Number Two Lagoon, Eratap, Teouma and Teouma Bush (Garae 2015).

One example of the growing power of area councils is their ability to place restrictions on regional activities. Every year in July, people in Vanuatu plan a weeklong

celebration of independence, culminating on 30 July, Independence Day. In one community, the leadership decided to leverage the event to draw revellers to the Elang Etas community so that they could experience its vibrancy and organisation, and so that the community would be acknowledged by urban citizens as a viable part of the urban fabric. A convenient, secondary aim was to use the event to generate funds to support the operations of EECA.

Starting in the first week of July 2019, youth members of the community cleared grass and brush from the community's common space and erected 54 stalls with bamboo frames that would host food and drink vendors, kava sellers, and handicraft makers. Soccer and volleyball competitions were organised, and teams were invited from other communities to participate. A Miss Etas competition was planned. Youth volunteers publicised the event in town, selling raffle tickets and seeking sponsorships from government departments. A gender-inclusive security committee was established that would police the event and provide escorts to women and girls. Numerous similar festival grounds were set up in various communities in and around Port Vila during the month of July. Until 2019, these events appear to have occurred entirely outside of state regulation, with no permits required and no state involvement necessary.

Then, in late-July 2019, the Elang Etas community was served with an unexpected notice that its festival would be shut down because it had not received a permit from the area council. This was a new regulation implemented by the provincial government that had not been effectively communicated with communities. Several days of information-gathering ensued, wherein organisers feared that they would have to shut down the Independence Day festivities. There was relief when days before the start of the celebration on 24 July, the area council officially permitted the event.

It turns out that the State-directed organisation of the area council is deeply embedded in outdated notions of who belongs in the urban area. Centred around the five urban villages, area council leadership is drawn from the ranks of chiefs and customary landowners from these villages – to the exclusion of tenants living on that land. This structure further solidifies a significant power imbalance that favours customary landowners over their tenants. This is a problem because the vast majority of urban growth in Port Vila and other Pacific cities is happening on lands that are owned by customary landowners.

### **An alternative governance entity: Communities**

In contrast to *villages*, *communities* are settlements without the history of customary land ownership in the area. They are often composed of migrants from outer islands or other parts of Efate. The distinction between villages and communities is a matter of degrees rather than any distinct feature or rule. To some extent, all villages and communities in Port Vila are mixed and non-homogeneous, at least compared to their historical compositions. A generation ago, one could generally expect that people living in a village were members of the extended kin network of the

customary landowners. Nowadays, villages are no longer home only to homogenous kin groups; Ni Vanuatu migrants and foreign expatriates live in villages and have leased land from customary landowners that have subdivided and leased to long-term tenants.

Communities can be homogenous, composed of people from a common island or group, living under the guidance and organisation of community committees and an elected or self-appointed chief. Increasingly, communities have *ol man kam* configurations, or people living in diverse communities composed of populations from multiple islands; a place where people from all around Vanuatu establish residence in a location that gives them access to the city. Port Vila is a variation of *mankam*, a sometimes-derogatory term used to refer to migrants from other islands (Smith 2017). In Port Vila, the term appears to have been repurposed by some community leaders to describe their urban fabric and other similar places in the city. At Elang Etas, where there are at least 22 islands represented, the community has sorted itself into 12 zones that are largely but not exclusively correlated with island of origin, according to the 2018 census.

Even though both villages and communities are growing in population diversity, there is an important distinction in that land tenure security is much stronger in villages. Although there are evictions of some people from urban villages, there has never been a case of wholesale eviction of an entire urban village, or of customary landowners being evicted from their lands. Customary land ownership is far too strong and foundational in Vanuatu, enshrined in the country's 1980 Constitution. It is this strength of customary landownership, however, that has produced the wholesale evictions of communities or large parts of communities. Since 2014, there are well-publicised evictions that have affected thousands of people, including Destination in 2014; 580 people (estimate based on interviews with community members and leaders) in Prima and Mele Waisisi (Napwatt 2018), and at least 1000 people and probably closer to 3000 in Bladinieres in 2018 (according to Cullwick 2018). The language used to talk about these populations in government documentation, by international advisors, and in popular discourse is very important as the label 'squatter' is applied to people who do have some form of permission to live on the land where they reside.

Determining how many people in Port Vila live in *communities*, as opposed to villages is difficult because there is no publicly available data source that answers this question due to the reliance on area councils as the administrative boundaries for Census data reporting. Elang Etas is certainly not Port Vila's original *ol man kam* community, but the community does have roots dating at least to the 1990s but today many people are not interested in life in a *community*. Port Vila offers alternatives. Inside the municipal boundaries of the city, people make the additional distinction between *community* living and *urban* living, distinguished by the presence of a chief and collaborative lifestyles in communities. At Elang Etas, the EECA has organised the community for all kinds of civic projects – from mothers' and youths' committees to human-rights training to fundraising for Independence Day celebrations.

## The EECA: A functioning governance entity

The reason that the EECA was established was to plan for tenure security in Elang Etas. Its logo (Figure 1) illustrates its mission of unity and inclusion, with interlocked hands of different colours arranged around a golden star. The star represents the Republic of Vanuatu, and its inclusion in the logo represents the community's recognition of the State in the identity of the community. The phrase, 'united we stand', signals community solidarity against the threats to the community namely, dispossession and eviction.

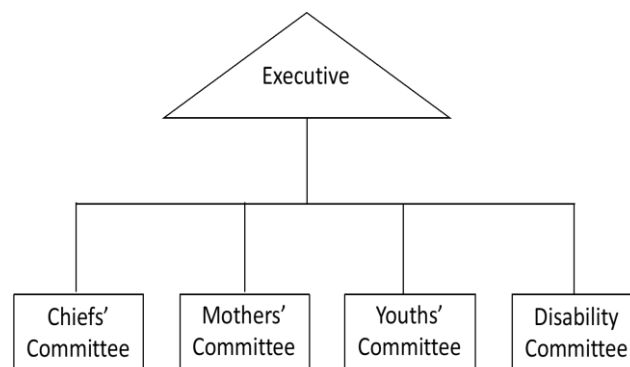
Figure 1. Elang Etas Community Association logo



With the endorsement of the Elang Etas Council of Chiefs, the Association decided to find out how much money people living in Elang Etas have paid under the customary and quasi-customary arrangements under which they reside. Elang Etas residents have also made significant financial and social investment in their community, and many believe that they have satisfied the terms of their agreement to live on this land. In the 2018 EECA Census, a total of 237 of the enumerated householders responded to a question about whether they had made land payments to the now-deceased former leaseholder. Of these, 232 reported that they had made some payments, and only five reported that they had made no payments. Of the 232 respondents that reported making a payment, 175 provided the amount of their payments. In 2019, these 175 households have paid a total of 57,512,862 Vatu (A\$732,648 in 2019 dollars) toward their usufructuary rights to this land, since they began making payments in the 1990s. Despite this, an ongoing land dispute means that people's tenure remains insecure.

Area councils and communities have chiefs in common. At Elang Etas, a council of 12 chiefs works in collaboration with the EECA Executive, but has voluntarily become integrated into the EECA as a component of the Association's structure. Figure 2 is a somewhat simplified reproduction of an EECA-produced figure showing the organisational structure of the Association.

Figure 2. EECA Organisational Structure



This is an unusual positioning of a new kind of social structure (the Association) over an established institution (chiefs). I have witnessed the EECA leadership structure survive two internal challenges, with community members and chiefs convinced of the need for this new structure of community organising. The first challenge occurred in 2018 during a closed session with the Council of Chiefs and the EECA Executive. The second challenge occurred at the first annual general meeting, held upon the closing of EECA's Year 1 activities in November 2019. One chief testified that a chief's responsibilities in a mixed, urban community are far too complex for the Council of Chiefs to also assume the role of advocating for the community with the State and outside entities. His responsibilities in maintaining the *kastom* and managing conflict within his own zone occupied all of his time. Other chiefs from Tanna, Ambae, Tongoa, and Epi agreed, arguing that the Executive should retain this role. A vote solidified the Executive's role as the spokespeople for the community and the interface with outside agencies.

In this *ol man kam* community, gathering data on land payments, for instance, is outside the scope of chiefly duty and expertise. It is, however, extremely important for future challenges to the community's legitimacy, and for future advocacy between the community and the State. In the 2018 census, 150 householders responded to assess whether they had completed the obligations they made with the lessee when moving to Elang Etas. Of these 150 respondents, 31 per cent reported that they had finished their payment obligations, either to the lessor or customary owner; 54 per cent reported that they had not yet completed their obligations; and 15 per cent did not know if they had completed payments. Fifty-eight per cent of households have made more than half of their required payments. In summary, the EECA found that most people living at Elang Etas believe that they have fulfilled their financial obligation or a significant part of it.

## Conclusion: Communities in governance

Current urban governance in Vanuatu has uncritically reproduced social structures such as area councils to the exclusion of other kinds of governance possibilities, has enabled the trope of the village to persist as the presumed building block of the city, and has allowed the inaccurate labelling of many places as 'informal'. *Communities*, offer



a possible alternative to the dogma of the existing city-village-informal distinction. Urban policy is currently under active construction in Port Vila, and there are competing narratives and logic that could affect this planning. One is top-down and State-led, one is bottom-up and community-generated, and one is longstanding and changing with the times – area councils, community associations, and chiefs, respectively. All are important to governance, as they represent the various social locations where people look for guidance, seek belonging, and secure their place in the city. Cities will continue to expand onto customary land and the tenure arrangements that residents make with landowners should be recognised even if they are oral or customary.

What is to be made of state engagement with customary processes when reliance on them excludes the majority of city dwellers? This is an important question that those who govern Port Vila should be asking. Recognising customary title and the role of chiefs in everyday society was a critical component of the independence movement in Vanuatu – a movement that still exists in the living memory of Vanuatu's lawmakers and bureaucrats. Incorporating chiefly authority into state institutions like area councils is an important step to successfully administering this diverse society – but it is no longer enough. *Communities* have introduced complexities to the urban landscape and governance systems like area councils must now be expanded to accommodate them.

## Notes

- 1 The 2016 Mini-Census Vanuatu National Statistics Office 2017, '2016 Post-TC Pam Mini-Census Report Vol. 1 Basic Tables,' Report, Port Vila: Ministry of Finance and Economic Management..conducted after Tropical Cyclone Pam (derived from Chart 3.7, p. 166) suggests that about 75 per cent of households in the peri-urban area councils (Mele, Ifira, Erakor, Eratap, and Pango) reported some other housing tenure than ownership. The same report (Table 1.14b) suggests that the 2016 metropolitan population living outside the municipal boundary was 27,304 people with around 50,000 living inside the municipal boundary. If 25 per cent of this population are living in non-ownership tenures like those at Elang Etas, this implies that about 6,800 people, or 9 per cent, in Port Vila are living in *communities* comprising about 2.5 per cent of the national population – and growing

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## Large ocean media: Reporting security in an age of new Pacific diplomacy

*Steve Sharp, TME Media and Education Services*

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

There is an increasingly urgent need in the Pacific for recognisable, independent and credible media discourses on national security that are disaggregated from the noise of self-appointed influencers on social media. National media institutions must bear this mantle because they are best placed to do so, for three reasons:

1. **Security literacy:** Journalists bound by professional codes of ethics are best placed to drive 'security literacy' from a low base. From global 'human security' agendas down to grassroots conceptions of material survival, reporters are required to make sense of the nuances and explain why they matter. Journalists are infinitely better placed than the shadowy voices that emerge from, and slide back into, the digital social media cracks, who are not accountable.
2. **The media as early warners:** The Pacific diplomatic playground is re-organising itself in ways that make us more connected, but in unpredictable ways. A professional class of journalists who are 'security literate' will be well placed to tell the story of regional integration in ways that protect the region against the disintegrative forces during this and any major period of geo-political upheaval.
3. **Transborder collaborations:** The task of tracking and keeping pace with regional developments and translating the detail into relevant national news is becoming increasingly complex, but no less urgent. The transborder nature of business and politics is ripe for cross-border collaborations between national media to explain the business–politics nexus to national and regional audiences.

This conception of rising intellectual demands on our professional reporters is problematic not least because it is riven by an ideological divide about the media's true and proper place in national development. On the one side, there are those who believe media should partner government in promoting agreed national goals (developmentalist thinking); on the other side, there is the view that national progress emerges from institutional competition where media record events but in doing so, also scrutinise power (watchdog role).

As Sheila Coronel notes (2010:111): 'The press as watchdogs of power is embedded in the self-definition of journalists and in varying degrees, also in public expectations of the media'.

Since the 1990s, the international donor community has also accepted that 'corrupt and inept governments were a major impediment to development efforts' (Coronel 2010:112). But governments have resisted media scrutiny, often in ways that degrade media institutions and threaten the physical safety of journalists. Expect the trend towards online harassment of reporters under political direction to continue (IFJ-SEAJU 2018).

The Pacific's shifting and competing security narratives are complicated. And this is where the Pacific media as regional storytellers are more challenged. What to make of all the speeches, communiques and bickering around the Pacific family dinner table? To simply report the words of leaders is insufficient. Journalists need to not only report the significant but to explain why it is significant. This means connecting the polished words of official declarations with the daily struggles of town and village – the folks in whose name security narratives are being spun. It also means pointing out the disconnections. Because therein lies the story.

### Undermining media scrutiny: A regional issue

Officials and leaders from across the region work within accountability structures and make political calculations about the risks of non-disclosure or 'no comment'. They must consider the chance of hidden information becoming public knowledge at some point and their capacity to hose it down.

The energy, persistence and skills required to pursue these kinds of stories should not be underestimated in any jurisdiction. They are especially exacting within the institutional structures of media-government relations in PNG and the wider Pacific. The youthfulness, inexperience and lack of confidence of the Pacific journalistic corps are well known. Add to that the regular hostility of leaders. The Fiji Prime Minister in the *Fiji Times* newspaper stated:

the *Fiji Times* is controlled by a cabal that manipulates the news agenda and uses inflammatory language to create disunity, division and instability and to advance its own political interests (Radio New Zealand 2015 in Singh 2017:4).

Or in September 2020, the Samoa Prime Minister referred to the leading daily *Samoa Observer* as ‘the Opposition’ and of trying to topple the government. The newspaper had earlier complained of being denied ‘the right to ask questions of the Prime Minister at weekly press conferences and even copies of bills before Parliament’ (*Samoa Observer* 2020).

## What is the media’s role?

There is also the tangible question as to whether audiences perceive the media’s role as one of scrutinising power? How do Samoan or PNG reporters flag issues of national interest to their audiences and relate them to metropolitan corruption? Perhaps developmentalist thinking is easier to absorb and the ‘watchdog’ metaphor less congruous.

A watchdog media is meaningless unless audiences come along for the ride. Reaching audiences in a deeper sense is about meeting information needs and nurturing conversations within ‘language communities’ where participants are both informed and feel they belong.

Within this model, knowledge of say, ‘national security’ is not centralised within government agencies and drip fed to select media (divide-and-rule) but distributed, where media expertise enables channels for informed interactions. As these channels multiply and gain community traction over time, intangible networks of trust solidify within them. At this point, the media can offer a check and balance on executive power (deliberative democracy). In this scenario, ‘security literacy’ for all participants rises on the same tide.

Professional news reporting has the potential to be a ‘journal of record’ for readerships. Rather than being purely episodic and attention-grabbing, news reporting can over time become the ‘first draft of history’ – not just recording history but preserving an historical memory that can mobilise communities of interest that impact politics, including at election time.

The efficiencies of access to digitised content are driving changes to media business models. Well-managed and creative use, re-use and re-purposing of digital content is what gives media businesses their competitive edge. But journalists are only one group of players. The global tech platforms are way ahead in terms of data capture and its creative re-use. Their model is to capture and monetise user data, not preserve historical memory.

In PNG, the most important media organisation is the National Broadcasting Corporation, with its radio channels extending into all villages. And yet, after years of media aid and ‘capacity building’ NBC has no website and therefore, no means of capturing the rich storytelling of its citizens over time and making ‘the national story’ accessible online to new audiences, researchers, journalists and students.

## Other forms of storytelling

Institutional media does not have a monopoly on storytelling. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the development space where NGOs have embraced ‘digital storytelling’. Communication for Development (C4D) is now an academic field as well as a development practice. Media skills are harnessed not in the traditional journalistic mode of factual reporting but as explicit tools for educational advancement and empowerment. Creative production is based on participatory methods with a strong emphasis on visual storytelling. Behaviour change campaigns are both an information source for, and a content competitor with, mainstream news media.

Every development organisation beyond a certain size employs media staff and contracts communication consultants for specific projects. Their media products serve as public relations competing for eyeballs and funds. They can also become influential content in their own right beyond their stakeholder base. C4D initiatives coincide with and are driven by the democratisation of media; they contribute to the expansion of network technology through apps and are drivers of social change.

Examples from PNG in recent years are *Yumi Sanap Strong* [www.yumisanapstrong.org](http://www.yumisanapstrong.org) and *Yumi Kirapim Senis* (Thomas et al. 2018). Their rich visual storytelling has led conversations around gender-based violence and community security with accessible content that can be repurposed in various advocacy and educational contexts.

C4D products impact news media in the Pacific and elsewhere in three ways:

- the market for creative content, especially visual content, is exploding as it is for the skills required to create it;
- creative media opportunities (jobs) have expanded just as traditional media business models are collapsing under pressure of re-invention; and
- this pressure encourages innovation in media operations but Pacific newsrooms cannot invest to transform their systems like the *New York Times* can. Donor funds have rushed in to fill the gaps, sometimes successfully, but institutional decay haunts large nation-wide enterprises, old and new.

## Media and security

Expanded notions of security are driven by island members pushing back against disempowering characterisations such as small, fragile and conflict-prone and promoting ‘large ocean states’ with stewardship over ‘the Blue Pacific’ (Tarte 2020:10).

ANU scholar Katerina Teaiwa goes further and identifies those responsible:

The Australian media, and certain activists, scholars, policymakers and leaders, often present Pacific nations as corrupt or conflict-prone 'failed states' whose instability is viewed in simplistic and often racialized terms ... Knowledge of the region's historical and cultural contexts remains shallow (Teaiwa 2019:58).

But what about the Pacific media's ability and willingness to track these shifting contexts and educate audiences region-wide about 'the expanded concept of security' and the common threats expressed in the Boe Declaration? On climate change, the region's media has been successful in driving climate literacy and inter-island awareness around themes of 'existential threat' and 'climate emergency'.

Through powerful (mainly visual) storytelling, the Pacific media ecosystem, which includes its science communicators, has created social media friendly discourses that connect with like-minded youth networks in Australia and New Zealand. As Teaiwa puts it: "'vulnerable" does not mean "incapable"' (ibid:67). Or as the former president of Kiribati urges:

we have no choice but to engage even more aggressively internationally, because the key to our survival will depend on whether international action is taken on climate change or not (Tong 2015:24).

It is a well-nourished field from which Pacific politicians can credibly speak with moral authority about collective responsibility and in the same breath, criticise Australian domestic policies.

## Case studies of reporting Pacific security

On 21 September 2017, Fiji Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama addressed the UN General Assembly as the president of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP23). He had come a long way from running a military-led dictatorship for eight years and an elected government for three. 'It is clear that global warming changes our very understanding of what our national interests are', he told the assembly as the first ever Pacific island COP president. Referring to Fiji's long history of UN peacekeeping he added: 'For 40 years, we have helped to make the world more secure – and now we are determined to make a successful contribution to the wider security of the planet through our leadership of COP23' (Bainimarama 2017).

It was a media masterstroke: the leader of a small Pacific nation encapsulating the hard and soft edges of security into its narrative of global environmental stewardship.

Expelled from the peak regional body the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) in 2009 (for not holding elections after its 2006 coup), Fiji established a rival body in 2013 – the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF) – with funding which included that from the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC). Fiji's leader launched Fiji's climate diplomacy through a vehicle that unlike the PIF, did not include Australia and New Zealand as members. The PIDF served Fiji's post-coup foreign policy interests but never won over PNG or Samoa. While it held no annual meetings in 2017 and 2018, the PIDF remained the primary medium for regional organisations to convey security perspectives.

Having won elections in 2014 and 2018, Bainimarama returned to the PIF meeting in September 2019 with enhanced standing and found a platform from which to pressure industrial nations in general, and Australia in particular. At last year's PIF gathering in Funafuti, Tuvalu, Fiji's rehabilitation was complete and its leader continued his regional activism making speeches that captured the media's attention. Addressing the Forum from which his nation had been evicted 10 years earlier, Bainimarama forged a pan-Pacific 'coalition of the vulnerable' against industrial nations (Bainimarama 2019).

Standing shoulder to shoulder, Fiji, Tuvalu and our Pacific Island neighbours intend to do everything humanly possible to get the world to take the decisive action needed to save low-lying atolls like Tuvalu from the rising sea levels and extreme weather events associated with climate change. ... But if...that effort fails because the industrial nations continue to selfishly put their own interests above our own, Fiji will offer a home to you – the people of Tuvalu. We have made the same offer to your neighbours in Kiribati (ibid).

Such rhetoric spoke to small island grievances and fears and it niggled its 'big brother' member of the Pacific family at a time of intensifying geo-political competition – with the PRC in the main frame – it also made great media fodder. One scholar calls this a 'more assertive, independent and innovative diplomacy by Pacific island states' producing a 'different regional security narrative focused on climate change' (Tarte 2020:3).

Such were the mercurial workings of Pacific climate politics and its capture of public attention, frequently through media coverage over the last decade, that this shift in the story was formalised by PIF member states in 2018 in the Boe Declaration, which refers to 'an expanded concept of security' covering human security (aid, rights, health and prosperity), environmental and resource security, transnational crime, and cybersecurity (PIF 2018).

## Environmental reporting: Fiji

Seven months before Bainimarama's magnanimous Tuvalu statement on environmental refugees, a story broke on an online news site based in New Zealand. A hotel casino development in Fiji – the largest in the country – was accused of damaging the foreshore (fishing grounds) on Malolo Island in breach of numerous environmental laws. The Chinese developer is accused of donating to the government and receiving special treatment in return.

An environment lawyer accuses the company of breaching its own lease and damaging land and reef over which it has no development approval. He is also quoted saying that government agencies were informed the previous year and supplied with drone photography but took no action.

The developer, the story reports, ignored several stop-work notices, including from the High Court. The lawyer used media to push for accountability:

The Chinese development has not stopped. Nor has it been made to stop, which has raised serious questions about the Fijian government's effectiveness or enthusiasm to administer its own environmental laws (Reid 2019a).

In a follow-up report a day later, landowners are calling for the eviction of the Chinese and local workforce. The report's lead announces that the Office of Public Prosecutions would prosecute the developer. The environment minister revealed he referred the alleged damage to prosecutors several months earlier. An opposition parliamentarian states:

Enforcement is weak and the villages suffer...All arms of government have been negligent here by not following through on enforcement. They should cancel the lease and get the company to rectify and pay damages (ibid).

By April, the same New Zealand reporting team were in Fiji investigating the same story but this time with a camera crew. The three-person crew were arrested. After being held overnight, the Fiji Government released them and went into damage control. 'Rogue officers', it said, were responsible for the arrests, following their release. As details filtered out about Fiji's bureaucratic inaction in the face of the Chinese company's impunity, the *Fiji Sun* ran a company press release under its own masthead defending the company and claiming it was investing in Fiji at the request of the Fiji Prime Minister (Maraia 2019).

By late February, not long after the story broke, the Prime Minister was telling tourism operators that investors damaging Fiji's environment would be banned. By April, the Malolo Island development approvals had been cancelled. The wheels of enforcement only started to turn after there had been widespread regional exposure.

## Restrictions on Fijian media

Critically, it was a foreign news site that raised the alarm, not the local press. When we move from Pacific summitry to the grassroots, maybe large ocean states *are* vulnerable – including their media.

Fiji's media operate under the shadow of the Media Industry Development Decree and its implementing agency the Media Industry Development Authority (MIDA).

[T]hat media legislation is more restrictive than anything we've had in previous history. Prior to the 2006 coup, media freedom in Fiji was seen to be almost on par with countries like Australia and New Zealand. But the 2010 Media Decree changed all that ... The main problem with the decree is the fines and jail terms stipulated for publishers and editors. The fines up to FJ\$100,000 [A\$66,000], I believe, and jail terms of up to two years and five years if you fall foul of the decree (Singh 2018).

Fiji's editors and reporters live in fear of the Media Industry Development Decree 2010 that had its origins in the suspension of constitutional government, public emergency regulations, and rule by military decree. Up until 2015, in addition to editors and publishers, the decree provided heavy fines and jail terms for individual reporters, an imposition removed following victory at the 2014 general elections.

Singh believes that various internal problems afflicting Melanesian media more generally magnify the impact of

external government restrictions. Poor reporting and errors when they do occur are evidence of 'lack of capacity' but also a weak institutional position manifest in low status, low pay and high staff turnover. He says:

downplaying the internal threats is counterproductive since they are a serious impediment to media freedom and media development in their own ways (Singh 2020:49).

When government attacks are launched or restrictive laws enacted, the media's position is further weakened, making it less likely to win audience support against these depredations. Most Fiji scholars and practitioners agree that punitive media laws including heavy fines and jail terms for editors and publishers are a recipe for a 'captured media' and self-censorship, not media industry development (Morris 2017:29).

## Environmental reporting: Papua New Guinea

On 25 August 2020, PNG's *Post-Courier* published an editorial on a recent taskforce investigation into logging operations in Northern Province, asserting that 'companies who have no respect for the law of PNG and habitually breach them must be banned from operating in PNG' (*Post-Courier* 2020). It was referring to, among other things, the escape by aircraft of 16 foreign workers before the taskforce arrived at their camp. This must be, the newspaper guessed, 'the tip of the iceberg'.

'We must change the image of PNG as an easily penetrable nation that can be used, abused and exploited by greedy corporate entities' (ibid.). Strong words from PNG's leading daily. The violations sounded like a textbook case of non-traditional security threats: foreign workers illegally breaching PNG's border, unregistered vehicles found at the logging site, police hired by loggers to secure their sites, bribes and gifts given to metropolitan officials, habitual lawbreakers left untouched, resource security imperilled and so on.

But ironically, the substance of the editorial accusation could have been credibly made at any time during PNG's decades-long history of timber piracy. And as is so often the case in stories of Pacific resource plunder, none of these entities is named!

Similarly, Lasslett laments the lack of investigative weight carried by mainstream PNG news outlets to the point where he concludes in the case of yet another land grab:

foreign citizens are better informed by their mainstream media about investigative research into improper or illegal commercial transactions in Papua New Guinea, than Papua New Guinea citizens (Lasslett 2015).

National court judgements, commission of inquiries, public accounts committee reports, auditor general reports, and published research is literally teeming with information on corruption, illegal resource theft, police misconduct and human rights abuses. And names are named! Senior politicians, civil servants, business leaders and major corporate brands are all explicitly cited (op.cit.).

It's one thing to access official documents but another to hold officials to account for them. Lasslett (ibid)

acknowledges this when he concludes: ‘the institutional structures are simply not in place to support professionals who want to engage in investigate reporting that scrutinise the dealings of the powerful’.

The origins of impunity are not in the formal structures but in the actual interactions between elected officials, the bureaucracy and journalists. Long-time former ABC correspondent in PNG, Sean Dorney provides a telling example. He recounts efforts by a news reporter from the state broadcaster NBC to discover how a Chinese consortium acquired a site in Port Moresby from PNG Telecom for their \$414m Chinatown project.

The reporter was passed from the Lands Minister to the foreign investor to the governor and on to the state vendor. And so it went on. How much did the consortium pay? No answers there (Dorney 2019:79–80). This form of stonewalling of journalists is routine across the Pacific. It occurs elsewhere too but the editorial effort to get to the bottom of it is premised on the journalist’s persistent belief in the underlying news value of the story. But this belief is insufficient. They must be backed by their editors. Such efforts outside the Pacific islands are commonly better resourced and promoted and therefore, have more impact.

## Moving towards a new media paradigm

Pacific journalists are as capable as any of producing impactful reporting on Pacific security.

But reporting the region’s crowded and complicated security landscape does not occur in an institutional vacuum. National security reporters must track their countries’ engagements on the regional and global stage so that their citizen audiences can make an informed judgment on how well their leaders are safeguarding the national interest. They must interpret their region with sufficient insight to tell credible stories of their nation’s unique place in it.

## Regional literacy

The Pacific project at the Guardian Australia is funded by the Judith Neilson Institute for Journalism and Ideas (<https://jninstitute.org/project/pacific-editor/>). Judging by the quality of the published articles, it appears to be a genuine and practical effort to address regional illiteracy among reporters and audiences alike. The collaborative model of funding Pacific reporters on the ground to write long-form journalism for a different readership is admirable – if it can be sustained and extended. There are numerous shining examples of creative long-form journalism that are transnational, of which The Panama Papers is only the best known.

They expose and name international actors and networks that undermine national sovereignty, retard genuine development, steal national wealth and create victims. Such journalistic push back has been a reaction to national repression against independent media (Benequista 2019). It also makes sense that media professionals collaborate across borders when trade, finance, capital, labour and crime are all transnational.

## Regulating social media

Professionalism alone will not protect journalists and their risk-averse business managers from targeted attacks and online influencers and their shadowy proxies. Considerable resources are arrayed against independent media whose core business is to focus audience attention on factual verification while telling a story.

These were spelt out last year at a Melanesia Media Freedom Forum (MMFF) in Brisbane where delegates expressed concern at the increasing range of threats aimed at journalists. These threats, they declared in their final statement, were undermining the accountability role played by journalists in Melanesian democracies (MMFF 2019)

Conventional journalistic methods can be overwhelmed by the emotional bluster of the social media pile-on. So often promoted as free speech, these viral moments produce the opposite – what I called ‘crowd-sourced censorship’.

Worldwide governments seek to rein in social media often to clamp down on harmful abuses and sometimes to sandbag against unrestrained criticism. The social media ecology has become more complicated since mainstream platforms have been implicated in fake news, data theft and influence operations against democratic states.

The Pacific has its own ecology with governments routinely threatening legislative measures, which just as regularly, are countered with libertarian objections. MMFF has led the objections. But significantly, last year’s forum declaration on social media was about literacy:

The media is ready to work with all parties that want to improve the social media landscape: There is an urgent need for the media to assert its role as a source of accurate and impartial information and to play a role in building social media literacy and public understanding of how to identify credible sources of information.

The statement sounds like a plea by media houses to its audiences to confront the social media scourge together. Rising media literacy will, the Forum hopes, make media consumers more discerning and more wary of the dangers of online content that manipulates, inflames and hijacks legitimate news narratives in ways that ultimately limit the online dialogue around issues that matter.

On the other hand, Vanuatu’s *Yumi Toktok Stret* Facebook group has been successful at driving conversations that hold leaders to account at election time. While not immune from criticism, it has avoided the polarisation and pile-ons that afflict so much online discourse. This has been possible because key officials have embraced the medium and invited democratic scrutiny.

Elsewhere, in Fiji, institutional media have co-existed with the often anonymous postings and leaks on social media. According to Singh, social media has become a source and cover for media outlets to publish claims that are already circulating in social media channels.

Governments have responded with social media regulation such as in Fiji, where the Online Safety Act 2018 targets dangerous online behaviour. Singh acknowledges a degree of public support for the legislation but fears

such laws can also ensnare reporters to the point where ‘government is now killing two birds with one stone’ (Singh 2018; Tarai 2019).

On another level, social media bloggers who follow no other ethical code than their own compete with the more deliberative journalism of the major mastheads. This can lead journalists down a slippery slope as they try to keep up with what the public are fixated on at any given moment. Along with the pressure to feed the 24-hour news cycle, social media can have the effect of degrading professional ethical standards (Tarai and Drugunalevu 2018:5).

Social media regulation is a global fact of life and will become more so. Increasingly, national security legislation encompasses cyberspace and the information warfare waged within it. National security threats are being viewed through the prism of cybersecurity. This has placed greater demands on journalists to probe what is by its nature hidden, hostile and hyper-partisan. For the profession, journalists require new precautionary skills to protect themselves and their sources (Benton 2019).

## The price of media freedom

The Boe Declaration on Regional Security is a recognition of shared security threats and by implication, the need for coordinated strategies to meet them. To extend this logic further:

countering these security threats expressed in non-traditional terms rely on informed and vigilant publics. The national media sectors with their networks down to almost every town and village are well suited to surveilling the security landscape and warning of impending threats to life, livelihood and living conditions.

So critical to the quality and timing of information is a culture of information sharing between journalists and government officials. But it appears that the spirit and purpose of Boe does not translate well to the bureaucratic cultures of individual member states. The stonewalling and hostility by Pacific government officials referred to above is a symptom of the dysfunction between two different professional cultures. Last November, the Melanesia Media Freedom Forum complained:

The unwillingness of politicians and officials to engage in dialogue is undermining the media’s accountability role: public figures are becoming more resistant to responding to direct questions from media, choosing instead to issue media releases, or statements on social media or to preferred media outlets (MMFF 2019).

Hard conversations need to be had about the need for both sides to understand and respect each others’ role. More functional interactions will lead to unblocking information flow in ways that serve the broader national interest. According to Ben Bohane, Communications Director at the ANU’s Australia Pacific Security College:

The only way to do it is to have government and media at the table working out the rules of the game to avoid this us-and-them mentality. We need to also remind government officials that the freedoms that are enshrined in their constitutions transcend individual leaders.

## Security and geography

In the north Pacific, the critical flow of information between reporters and officials appears to be no more functional. Last August, Palauans were kept in the dark about the timing of a visit by US Defence Secretary Mark Esper (Kesolei 2020). The Republic of Palau, which has a compact agreement with the United States, is currently reviewing the agreement with its long-time underwriter, as are its Micronesian neighbours Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). Current compact funding arrangements will end for RMI and FSM in 2023 and for Palau in 2024 (Firth 2010).

The importance of these negotiations to the security of Micronesian peoples well into the future is obvious but the mere presence of such a high-level political actor in their region will always test the analytical skills of local reporters. Their written accounts are disadvantaged as long as they are unable to frame their own news agendas. Like an episode of *Survivor*, the location is a mere backdrop to a scripted message delivered to the world with the locals out of frame.

Three hours after touchdown, the Defence Secretary was gone again with a minimalist 143-word Department of Defence statement released in his wake. No wonder the dominant story that spread globally was the letter to Esper from the Palauan president urging the US to set up military facilities on the islands (Carreon and Doherty 2020).

The release of the letter played cleverly to different audiences and showed a Pacific statesman well versed in the ‘new Pacific diplomacy’, combining traditional defence and non-traditional economic security agendas to amplify Palau’s strategic value as a large ocean state not to be ignored by great-power competitors in the north Pacific.

Equally adept has been the joint call by the leaders of Palau, Nauru, Kiribati, RMI and FSM to threaten withdrawal from the PIF if their Micronesian nominee for the next Secretary-General is not installed, according to an arrangement to rotate the position between the three PIF sub-regions (Carreon 2020).

Over in Guam, Mar-Vic Cagurangan publishes *Pacific Island Times*, an online magazine that covers Guam, the Northern Marianas and Palau. She manages a team of about 12 freelance writers who have access to local officials. However, even though Guam is a trust territory of the US, they cannot approach official sources based on the US mainland:

The Joint Region Marianas is our direct contact to the military. We can ask them questions. If we get a response, we’re going to get a one-line or two-line response. But otherwise, it’s not as accessible as we hope them to be. The inaccessible sources [are] the national officials, national agencies. We do not have the same access to national sources in the same way our counterparts in the mainland do.

In Palau, the information culture of government is more open but the journalistic culture underdeveloped to the point where, according to Palau-based correspondent and chair of media advocacy group Pacific Freedom Forum, Bernadette

Carreon, 'they are not well informed yet to ask questions. That's the tricky part here, confidence'. Professional interactions do not allow for reporters to build trust with their government sources. On the contrary, she says, 'Most of the time they scrutinise the media.'

Both women by necessity are generalists in what they report 'from politics to police'. This leaves few openings for developing specialist reporters in say, national security, diplomacy, or foreign affairs at a time when specialist knowledge and experience is most required. For the young reporters that Cagurangan supervises:

[security is] kind of a strange concept for them since they're new to this field. If they have an understanding at all of security issues, it's very thin, not enough information for them to write a story that is as informative as it should be.

## Large ocean media

Organised civil society has influenced how the new Pacific diplomacy frames regional interests – from ocean management, trade policy to what rights need protecting. But non-traditional threats compel us to recognise the media as civil society embedded in the fibre of an evolving Pacific regionalism. Protecting the oceans of the 'Blue Pacific' depends in part on staunching the flow of information pollution washing over the islands. A 'Blue Pacific' without these soft defences is as vulnerable as a small island unable to monitor and protect its vast marine habitat.

With expanded concepts of security, we need an expanded role for media. And within the chaotic attention economy, there are opportunities for Pacific journalists to survey their rich and nuanced security landscape and expand their storytelling for a more integrated region, consolidating information markets by multiplying consensus-style dialogues underwritten by principles of free expression.

This requires a confidence on their part to re-frame and re-package their own unique accounts and promote them through regional (and international) media markets. Media capacity building in the Pacific is nothing new but the speed and complexity of evolving security agendas will require a new way of telling to cut through the crowded and noisy transborder mediascape.

This dynamic landscape has the potential to profoundly impact Pacific identities, forge new cross border alliances and lead to new demographic patterns for island cultures. Pacific journalists have a critical role in explaining these changes to their publics in ways that harmonise with local conceptions of security.

## Note

- 1 Due to publication dates, this journal does not include two very significant events that occurred in the Pacific on February 5, 2021. These were the Micronesian countries leaving the Pacific Island Forum and the unexplained deportation from Fiji of the Vice Chancellor of the University of the South Pacific.

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# Telecommunication security in the Pacific region

*Amanda HA Watson, The Australian National University*

## The telecommunication sector in the Pacific

The telecommunication sector in the Pacific consists of companies that provide services and governments that legislate relevant rules, often with an independent regulator that sells spectrum and ensures compliance. For consumers, the main devices used are mobile telephones, the internet, and landline telephones powered by an infrastructure that includes undersea, underground and overhead internet cables, telecommunication towers, and internet exchange points.

Across the Pacific region, there has been:

dramatic growth in the uptake of mobile technology since around 2005, fuelled by competition, market liberalisation, network expansion, introduction of pre-paid mobile services and [the] sale of more affordable mobile devices (Watson et al. 2017:117).

Nonetheless, user uptake remains below potential, with only:

38 per cent of the population [was] subscribed to a mobile service as at the end of 2018, [and] this trails the average for least developed countries (44 per cent) (GSMA 2019:3).

There is substantial variation between countries, with the highest uptake of mobile telephony in Fiji (84 per cent), followed by Palau (67 per cent), New Caledonia (66 per cent), and Guam (65 per cent), and the lowest uptake in Marshall Islands (11 per cent), the Federated States of Micronesia (17 per cent), Kiribati (19 per cent), and Tuvalu (24 per cent) (GSMA 2019). The most populous country in the region is Papua New Guinea (PNG), also home to the largest number of people who do not own mobile telephones (Highet et al. 2019).

Despite the expansion of mobile telephone networks, internet access has remained expensive and unreliable (Cullen and Hassall 2017). In 2020, new undersea internet cables are predicted to increase bandwidth availability and speeds and possibly reduce prices in several countries. The Coral Sea Cable links PNG and Solomon Islands with Australia, while the Manatua Cable connects Samoa, Niue, Cook Islands and French Polynesia. In addition, mobile networks are transitioning from voice calls and text messaging to an increasing focus on mobile internet capability, allowing Pacific Islanders to access the internet using mobile devices. Deployment of advanced mobile networks and the availability of cheap smartphone handsets are predicted to enable a third of the region's population to have mobile internet access by 2025 (GSMA 2019). In addition, office workers in urban areas are increasingly likely to have internet access at desktop computers in their workplaces.

Social media platforms allow internet users to interact with one another, share photographs, distribute videos, voice their opinions, and re-distribute materials they have received. Such platforms have grown in popularity in recent years: 'as of November 2012, there were approximately

700,000 Pacific Island Facebook users' (Cave 2012:7). By November 2018, there were about the same number of Facebook users (approximately 750,000) in PNG alone (Highet et al. 2019).

## The Boe Declaration and the telecommunication sector

The Pacific Islands Forum's 2018 Boe Declaration on Regional Security included reference to information sharing – which could be aided through the use of telecommunications – and called for an increasing emphasis on cybersecurity 'to maximise protections and opportunities for Pacific infrastructure and peoples in the digital age' (Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat 2018:n.p.). Increasing access to telephones and internet connectivity provides opportunities, but also creates security risks including cyber-attacks and transnational crime.

## Telecommunication sector regulation

Telecommunication access supports many kinds of communication and enables communication that can be viewed as 'good' – such as telehealth, remote learning and co-ordination of logistics. Telecommunication access also enables communications that are criminal or deemed to be 'bad' – such as harassment, bullying, and child abuse. Criminal use of telecommunication requires responses from law enforcement, while other beneficial use can invoke personal or community responses, or legislative changes and policy shifts. It is worth noting that telecommunications can also be used to report crimes, for example, through a police telephone hotline in Lae, PNG (Putt et al. 2020).

Pacific Island governments and donor partners generally view telecommunication access as beneficial, although there are concerns about negative impacts. In particular, social media platforms are viewed with concern. Pacific Island governments have attempted to regulate social media by devising legislation to prosecute cybercriminals and in some cases have tried to restrict access or threatened to do so (Kant et al. 2018). As Singh has explained:

while governments could be accused of censorship, they have some real concerns about social media abuse, and the damage to individuals, communities and society (2020:55).

For instance, the government of PNG introduced a cybercrime law in 2016 that 'allows the prosecution of people who publish defamatory material or incite violence on social media, raising concerns that it could be misused to punish legitimate speech' (Freedom House 2019:n.p.). Critics have pointed out that the law does not include wording that 'protects freedom of expression, specifically critical political discourse' (Kant et al. 2018:70). Addressing such concerns, Dawidi has argued that the law is:

not the result of some sinister ploy by the Government to shut out our right to freedom of speech (which in any case, is a qualified Constitutional right) or opinions on corruption (2016:n.p.).

In Nauru, Facebook was blocked for nearly three years (Kant et al. 2018) and in 2020, similar bans were proposed in Samoa (Wilson 2020) and Solomon Islands (Kekea 2020). In 2018, the then PNG Communication Minister Sam Basil threatened to ban Facebook – a suggestion that received widespread criticism within the country (Kant et al. 2018, Matsakis 2018). A policy of mandatory mobile telephone registration has limited certain people's access, at least temporarily (Watson 2020).

## **Challenges for telecommunication companies in the Pacific**

For telecommunication operators in the region (or those considering entering the region), there are a number of challenges, including small populations, low population densities, widely dispersed islands, and the need for access to sufficient spectrum (GSMA 2019). In PNG, telecommunication companies face these challenges and are also hindered by: mountainous terrain; very limited electricity provision; low adult literacy rates; high costs of infrastructure maintenance; re-fuelling and upgrades; frequent infrastructure vandalism; and disputes with landowners at tower sites (Highet et al. 2019, Watson, Miller and Schmidt 2020).

## **Market competition, liberalisation and persistent monopolies**

Twenty years ago, most Pacific nations had only one telecommunication company in operation. Since then, there have been efforts to increase competition – a process known as market liberalisation – across PNG, Fiji, Vanuatu, and Solomon Islands (Foster and Horst 2018, GSMA 2019, Watson 2011). Not all efforts at market liberalisation have, however, been successful – an effort to introduce competition in Marshall Islands has had no success as yet (GSMA 2019).

Introducing competition creates consumer choice, leading to reductions in retail prices. Sometimes – coinciding with privatisation of a state-owned entity – competition can also lead to an expansion of network coverage, increased availability of telephone services, and increased efficiency (World Bank 2005). For example, after competition was introduced to the telecommunication sector in Vanuatu, access to telecommunication services increased, 'reducing the costs of doing business and expanding business opportunities' (Basnett and Brien 2009:54).

According to the GSMA – a peak body for mobile telephone companies – 'the most favourable market structure for promoting investment and innovation is one with two or three mobile operators' (2019:11). In the Pacific region, small populations in island nations and territories, coupled with low population density, make it difficult for markets to support more than one or two players, thus limiting market competition (GSMA 2019). Out of 23

countries and territories, 13 have only one active mobile operator and Guam is the only country to have four mobile operators (GSMA 2019). In PNG, Digicel is the only company offering mobile network coverage in rural areas, resulting in an effective monopoly because consumers there do not have the option of using other service providers (Suwamaru 2015, Watson and Fox 2019).

There are numerous reasons why persistent monopolies are concerning. Monopolies present potential security risks because the people in such locations are dependent on one company for all of their telecommunication needs. If the company experiences technical failures, becomes insolvent, or decides for any reason to leave that market, the citizens may be left with no telecommunication services. As Suwamaru has explained, a monopoly coupled with a weak regulatory environment could mean that 'citizens may be subject to the whims of the incumbent [...], with associated likely impacts on price and choice' (2015:1–2).

## **Telecommunication sector vulnerabilities**

Aside from regulatory, operational and market issues, the Pacific region's telecommunication sector faces two key vulnerabilities that could threaten the sector's long-term viability and sustainability – natural disasters and cybersecurity.

The Pacific region is prone to natural disasters and their frequency and severity are likely to increase due to climate change (Australian Department of Defence 2016, Barnes 2020, Conroy 2019). In addition, PNG and other Pacific nations experience earthquakes and volcanic eruptions due to tectonic plate movements. Earthquakes have been known to damage undersea and underground cables (Wall 2020). Overhead cables and towers are also vulnerable to storms, cyclones and landslides. Flooding can make roads impassable, meaning re-fuelling and maintenance vehicles cannot reach telecommunication towers to keep them functioning. For instance, in Central and South Bougainville, vehicles often need to ford rivers to complete their journeys and this can be impossible if there has been heavy rain upstream (Watson et al. 2020).

Cybersecurity is an important area of concern, due to the technology now available in the Pacific region. As stipulated in the Boe Declaration, cybersecurity requires an increased emphasis. An expected rise in internet access due to the launch of new undersea internet cables in the Pacific region 'will require dramatic and rapid improvements to currently low levels of cyber maturity' (Australian Strategic Policy Institute 2017:4).

A computer emergency response team (CERT) had been established for the Pacific region in 2011, but its operations were suspended in 2014, due to lack of funding (Australian Strategic Policy Institute 2017). The Australian Government launched the Pacific Cyber Security Operational Network (PaCSON) initiative in 2018 that allows numerous Pacific nations, Australia, and New Zealand 'to share cyber security threat information, tools, techniques and ideas' (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade n.d.:1). But even with this increased focus on transnational collaboration, there has been no meeting of the relevant

Pacific ministers since 2015 (Hogeveen 2020). Hogeveen posits this could be because cybersecurity is considered a national issue, rather than one requiring regional coordination, and he also speculates there may be a level of competition between Pacific nations that want to seize opportunities by advancing their technology expertise and capability (ibid). There are also gender implications to consider:

The rapidly evolving digital connectivity across the Pacific brings many opportunities – for increased access to market information, better educational resources and political voice. But there are also well-known downsides of increased digital access, no less relevant in the Pacific. Social networking can bring cyberbullying, and more intense surveillance of partners. Where inequity between the sexes is already high these vulnerabilities are magnified. Empowering women to be aware of the pitfalls, and to make the most of the opportunities will require them to be at the policy table and able to access information about digital security. (Gillies 2020:n.p.)

A review of the ‘cyber maturity’ of 25 countries in the Asia–Pacific region found that the four Pacific nations included were lowly ranked: Vanuatu was 17th; Fiji was 22nd; PNG was 23rd; and Solomon Islands was 25th out of 25 countries (Australian Strategic Policy Institute 2017). Within the region, ‘individual country responses to cyber-crime vary significantly, and most changes are quite recent’ (Kant et al. 2018:68). According to Hogeveen, numerous Pacific nations ‘have reviewed, or are currently reviewing, legislation related to data-sharing, cybersecurity and universal access’ (2020:3). Hogeveen (2020) assessed the cybersecurity preparedness of several Pacific Island nations by reviewing their policy settings and whether they have a CERT. Table 1 summarises these findings, with additional information on cybercrime legislation from Kant et al. (2018).

Cybersecurity has links to geostrategic competition and geopolitical tensions because Pacific countries import technology from third-party providers. For instance, Australia and several other nations have banned the Chinese company Huawei from participating in the rollout of their upcoming advanced mobile networks, mainly due to allegations ‘that the company’s products may purposely contain security holes that China’s government could use for spying purposes’ (Panettieri 2020). By contrast, the PNG State Enterprises Minister Sasindran Muthuvel has been quoted as saying that Huawei is currently the preferred communication equipment supplier for the country (The National 2020). It is understood that a driver of Australia’s decision to fund the Coral Sea Cable was that it did not want China’s Huawei providing an undersea internet cable to PNG and Solomon Islands. Australia provided a domestic cable within Solomon Islands, but Huawei has built a domestic cable within PNG, funded with a loan from China’s EXIM Bank.

Another example is a data centre constructed for the PNG government by Huawei through an earlier loan, which an Australian-funded report later deemed to be below expected cybersecurity standards (Grigg 2020a). China denied the implication that they were spying (Yafoi

2020, see also Braddock 2020). The PNG Communication Minister Timothy Masiu has labelled the data centre a failure (Moi 2020) and said the loan for its construction should not be repaid (Grigg 2020b). The debt for the data centre project is in addition to other debts owed to China for communication sector initiatives, including the domestic cable already mentioned (Wall 2020).

Table 1: Cybersecurity in the Pacific

Country	Policy settings	CERT status
Fiji	There is no cybersecurity strategy but there is a commission to oversee online safety. A 2018 bill ‘focuses on countering irresponsible social media use’ (Hogeveen 2020:17).	There is no national CERT.
Nauru	There is cybercrime legislation.	
Papua New Guinea	A 2016 bill targets cybercrime.	There is a national CERT.
Samoa	There is a national cybersecurity policy. Cybercrime has also been added to existing crimes legislation.	Scoping activities have been undertaken for a national CERT.
Solomon Islands	A working group is developing a national cybersecurity policy.	There is a design of a proposed national CERT.
Tonga	There is cybercrime legislation.	There is a national CERT.
Vanuatu	There is a national cybersecurity policy.	There is a national CERT.

Source: Based on Hogeveen (2020) and Kant et al. (2018).

## Large players in the Pacific

Although there are several players in the Pacific telecommunications market, the dominance of two mobile network operators means the region is reliant upon their continued operation.

Digicel was established by Irish businessman Denis O’Brien and commenced operations in Jamaica in 2001 before expanding throughout the Caribbean and to numerous countries in Central America over the next five years (Foster and Horst 2018). Digicel’s first Pacific market was Samoa in 2006, followed by its launch in PNG in 2007. Digicel also operates in Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, and Nauru. Digicel made a substantial investment to establish mobile networks in the Pacific and build goodwill through various initiatives – including sports sponsorship and the establishment of a philanthropic foundation in PNG (Foster and Horst 2018, Watson and Mahuru 2017, Watson and Seddon 2017). Within Pacific markets, Digicel’s dominance varies – it has 92 per cent market share in PNG (Highet et al. 2019) – but only a third of the market in Fiji (Foster and Horst 2018, McLeod 2020). As well as providing telecommunication services, in PNG, the company

also offers an online news service and pay television (Suwamaru 2015).

A weighty concern regarding the sustainability of Digicel's operations in the Pacific is the substantial burden of debt held by the parent company, Digicel Group. Denis O'Brien owns 99.9 per cent of Digicel Group (Brennan 2020a), which reportedly had a large debt of US\$7 billion as of June 2020 (McLeod 2020). Digicel Group offered its Pacific business as security to its creditors in a debt restructuring (Needham 2020) that reduced its debt by US\$1.6 billion (Brennan 2020a). Credit ratings agency Moody's has reportedly suggested that the company is effectively defaulting on its loans (Brennan 2020b). Digicel Group has indicated that it expects a downturn in earnings due to the impacts of the novel coronavirus of 2019 (COVID-19) (Brennan 2020a).

Amalgamated Telecom Holdings (ATH) is a public company listed on the South Pacific Stock Exchange in Fiji with mobile networks in American Samoa, Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, and Vanuatu. ATH recently received funding from the Asian Development Bank to set up a new mobile telephone network in PNG (Asian Development Bank 2020). ATH has a partnership with Vodafone in some markets, sport sponsorship arrangements in Fiji and Samoa, and operates a philanthropic foundation in Fiji. According to a March 2020 financial statement, the company made a profit in the preceding year but paid no dividends and considers regulation a threat to those profits, stating 'profitability can be significantly impacted by regulatory agencies which govern the telecommunication sector' (Amalgamated Telecom Holdings 2020:48). The company also noted the uncertain impact of COVID-19, related travel restrictions and potential economic fallout.

In small states, governments may not be able to effectively regulate the market or 'have the capacity to enforce a licence breach against a company like Digicel, especially when the company has engaged a previously underserved population' (Logan and Forsyth 2018:19). In order for Pacific nations to maintain access to telecommunication services, it would be wise to balance the sustainability of corporations with scrutiny of their actions through regulatory oversight (Logan and Forsyth 2018).

## Conclusion

Availability of mobile telephones is a relatively recent phenomenon in many parts of the Pacific and is a noteworthy development, given limited landline telephone penetration. The internet has recently become more available. The telecommunication sector is crucial as an enabler of communication, which has an intrinsic value:

Communication has value of itself, not just as a means to other ends like increased access to markets or the achievement of development goals. (Watson 2011:277)

Telecommunication companies operating in the region face numerous challenges, including damage to infrastructure due to natural disasters, and an immature cybersecurity structure. Pacific governments would do well to balance the

need for cybersecurity with citizens' rights to freedom of expression. Various actors could work together to address the need for more robust and secure telecommunications networks and markets.

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# Listening to Pacific Security Practitioners: Determination, skills and diversity

*Jay Caldwell, The Australian National University*

## Overview

The Boe Declaration provides an important catalyst for Pacific Island conversations on key security issues. This paper provides an example of a collaborative conversation that encouraged frank discussion on the priority security challenges across the region including how Pacific people prefer to address their security risks and how they perceive future security in the Pacific.

In 2019, the newly formed Australia Pacific Security College (PSC) had an open conversation with Pacific security practitioners on the region's security risk profile. The Pacific practitioners expressed a shared determination to take agency over their own security risks and build their capacity to respond – regardless of the threat. As a result, there was high interest in having the right human capital and skills mix available, whether that was within the national and regional institutions or through the relationship between formal and customary governance structures.

The conversation was strongly focused on human security issues, including health and gender which were given particularly high emphasis as nationally destabilising and less well addressed and climate and environmental security as magnifiers of human security issues. The levels of harm arising from traditional security concerns were difficult to quantify.

## Setting up the conversation

Between July–December 2019, the PSC leadership team conducted a series of conversations with 107 Pacific security practitioners to understand their security priorities in greater detail. All of the practitioners held formal roles as: government officials; leaders of regional organisations; political advisers; leaders of uniformed forces; leaders of non-government organisations; officials from multilateral organisations; and academics. The PSC directly consulted with leaders in seven Pacific Island countries, seven regional organisations, and with a number of Australian and New Zealand officials. Approximately 40 per cent of consultation participants were women.

The objective of the conversations was to:

1. identify the norms that govern behaviour and security activity;
2. illuminate the way that Pacific security systems are governed; and
3. identify opportunities for collaboration (Jenz & Wofford, 2008).

Pacific leaders engaged in the conversation to shape the suite of activities that would form the PSC's 2020 work plan, rather than as a research activity. This paper considers the aggregated messages from across the region rather than those from specific practitioners. The picture generated through

these conversations was partial. Our highest volume of engagement was with Melanesia, some engagement with Polynesian states, and limited engagement with the small island state members of the Pacific Islands Forum. The limited reach was due to the travel disruptions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The PSC will progressively fill the gaps in this picture, as travel and digital engagement permits, to deepen its contribution to the Pacific security conversation.

## Determination to seize the agenda

The first striking insight from our conversations was the determination to assert Pacific agency despite the complexity of the security environment.

At an individual, institutional and national level, Pacific security practitioners reflected on the broader paradigm shift that Fry and Tarte (2015) have labelled 'new Pacific diplomacy' – the confident assertion of collective Pacific identity and interests on the global agenda. It is reflected in the way Pacific leaders have used the Boe Declaration as an instrument to shape the narrative on what can legitimately be construed as 'security' in the Pacific region. It is echoed in public messages by senior Pacific leaders on the importance of the Pacific asserting its shared interests in a contested environment (Tuilaepa 2020; Taylor 2019).

Confidence at the regional level is percolating down to the national and institutional level. For individual practitioners, the Boe Declaration was seen as a source of legitimacy, authority, and pride in a distinctly Pacific tailoring of security. Despite the complexity of the security environment, a number of confident practitioners also saw the geopolitical competition of the moment as an opportunity to leverage in negotiations with larger partners. This view aligned with the strong public messages from regional leaders about the opportunities that competition can provide to the Pacific (Taylor, 2019).

While striking, there are some caveats to Pacific intent. The absorptive capacity of Pacific states for enhancing security capability was at – or in some cases beyond – limits. Some small island states with limited bureaucratic capabilities discussed feeling overwhelmed by security challenges that required sustained focus, coordination or high levels of multilateral collaboration. Indeed, the conversation with all Pacific security practitioners quickly turned to the skills and capabilities they needed.

## The priority is skills

The second striking insight from our conversation is that Pacific leaders consistently focused on capability over threats/issues. The uncertainty and volatility of the security

environment combined with the limited human capacity of governments are driving an increased appetite for skills development. If Pacific countries are to assert their own agency in addressing security challenges, they need to develop sovereign capability.

Pacific practitioners identified the key challenge for addressing complex security risks as a lack of government collaboration and coordination. The desperately needed skills outlined by Pacific security leaders were leadership, deeper analytic capacity, security policy development skills, and international engagement capacity across government. Core public service skills and capacity such as writing, communication, and data management, were also identified. The priorities are captured in Figure 1 below.

*Figure 1: Skill requirements identified by Pacific security practitioners*



The call by Pacific security leaders for improved collaboration and coordination resonates with the ‘Blue Pacific’ framing. As Samoan Prime Minister Tuilaepa Aiono Sailele Malielegaoi described, the Blue Pacific is about more than healthy oceans; it is a regional narrative on the importance of connectedness, stewardship and taking responsibility (Tuilaepa, 2017). Collaboration is critical if Pacific security leaders are to address the complex security issues the region faces, but there is widespread recognition that the siloed operations of governments are inhibiting their ability to respond to threats or seize opportunities, particularly in relation to the development and implementation of their national security strategies.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the practitioners saw the commitment by Pacific Island Forum countries to develop a national security strategy (under the Boe Declaration) as a useful mechanism to drive whole-of-government collaboration on security. There is a difference between developing a strategy and implementing with impact. All countries still appear to be searching for the commitment, authority and supporting institutions needed to drive multi-agency collaboration and inclusion, such as National Security Committees (which allow ministers to integrate and align a

whole-of-government security effort). While we heard strong interest in national security decision-making structures internationally, most felt that any architecture needed to be adapted to Pacific contexts in order to be useful and sustainable.

Several security leaders noted their communities would be safer and stronger if governments could coordinate with customary authority structures such as chiefs, churches, and women’s associations. Many practitioners saw customary structures as having the potential to play a powerful role in responding to domestic security issues, e.g. health, food, and community-based law enforcement. However, there was frustration with getting very different social and authority structures to align. One example of success we heard in Fiji was the appointment of the *Turaga Ni Koro* (village headmen) as primary search and rescue (SAR) coordinators for incidents at sea, with the authority to report and initiate SAR activities (Fiji Government 2019).

The most common direct request for assistance that PSC received from practitioners was to strengthen the national capacity to conduct strategic analyses. Pacific countries want to be able to say with confidence what their own security concerns are, rather than have someone external define them. They also want to engage decision-makers and develop a shared picture of security threats between the political class and other relevant stakeholders.

Several Pacific countries have ambitions to establish or enhance dedicated analytic capacity. Fiji established the National Integrated Coordination Centre (NICC) in October 2019 to ‘contextualise risks that may develop into a national crisis and recommend mitigating measures ... to manage ... and allow for a better situational awareness’ (Kumar 2019). Importantly, the view from several security leaders was that analytic skills would only be developed and sustained through the creation of a career pathway for analysts.

**Policy development** was a conversation that covered the design of new security policy and the challenges of implementing whole-of-government policy. We heard some examples of practices that appear contrary to effective policy development, including security policy proposals being presented to Cabinet for decision with no form of costing, and no requirement for proposals to consider or align with policies/responsibilities already in place. We also heard examples of strong policy processes and Pacific countries forming and driving partnerships to achieve their policy development goals. Several donor countries are active in this space, providing training and partnering to support the development of key pieces of national security policy. Indeed, the PSC has subsequently begun a dialogue with the Fiji Government to identify and reflect on the strengths of Fiji’s ‘home grown’ solutions to national security policy challenges (Sovasiga 2020).

**Leadership** was seen as a key requirement for Pacific countries and communities to secure their interests, although the characteristics of leadership required at the national level were not always clearly expressed. Pacific security practitioners explained that leadership development was a fiercely contested area, as regional donors see it as an



opportunity for access to and collaboration with current and emerging decision makers. The loudest voices on the need for leadership were the regional organisations, with most offering some form of leadership training.

There are a number of characteristics of leadership that practitioners believe are required to improve overall security outcomes: leaders need confidence and judgment in the face of political pressures; they need a vision for modernising operations and to be champions of change; and they need to plan, mentor and develop their replacements to ensure the strengthening of security capacity over time.

There was a persistent sense that something was missing from the current capacity development offerings on leadership, but it was difficult to identify the gaps without wider consultations about needs. PSC in partnership with lead agencies in-country ran the facilitated multi-agency workshops to identify security priorities. In these workshops, Pacific practitioners identified that they wanted to strengthen their leadership capacity by improving their ability to facilitate a shared security conversation and their skills to provide their own strategic analyses.

Practitioners also frequently raised the need for improved international engagement skills to meet the demands of a contested international environment. Practitioners noted that their countries could get more of what they need if their public services could better handle international engagement, diplomacy, and foreign policy. Some practitioners mentioned examples of where donors had negotiated projects directly with line agencies to take advantage of the limited understanding on the ground of strategic implications or broader national interests. One practitioner envisioned building a small cohort of policy advisers with the skills to engage donors and assess the risks arising from all new proposals.

## Coherence and diversity: Security threats

The third striking insight from our conversations was how Pacific security practitioners defined the boundaries of security and what they identified as pressing threats. The security threats raised by practitioners reinforced the Boe Declaration categories of human, climate/environment, and traditional security. The conversations helped us to unpack how these high level categories were understood in the Pacific.

**Human Security:** Human security was the biggest focus, even if practitioners were unclear on the definition. Human security coalesced most acutely on the issues of health security, gender, and youth. Some Pacific practitioners made passing references to economic security and even labour mobility as human security issues, but those ideas were not further developed in our conversations. Given the anticipated impact of COVID-19 on Pacific economies, we will be listening for a shift in the dialogue and whether Pacific security leaders consider economic resilience an element of human security.

During the 2019 consultations – even prior to the 2019 Samoan Measles Epidemic and COVID-19 Pandemic – health security was already the most prominent single

security issue raised in all country consultations. Rather than infectious disease, practitioners prioritised Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) such as heart disease and cancer as primary health security threats. Cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancers and chronic respiratory diseases account for more than 80 per cent of all deaths in the region, 50 per cent of all premature mortality (those under 70 years of age), and impose heavy costs on economically constrained Pacific governments (World Health Organization, 2014; Magnusson and Patterson 2015).

NCDs also have a direct impact on the capacity of security services to address national security risks. Practitioners noted that long serving staff are often taken out of the promotion stream early due to NCDs (e.g. gout and diabetes) at a time when they could be making a significant contribution. In 2019, Fiji Police identified that 77 per cent of officer deaths from 2014–19 were from NCD-related illnesses (Chaudhary, 2019).

When gender-based violence was raised in our consultations, most security practitioners described it as a characteristic of their environments that needed attention, but not specifically as a security challenge of focus. Samoa is one country that has explicitly addressed gender-based violence as a security threat, noting it has reached the point where the volume of violence is having a ‘serious impact on development’ (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018:12). However, gender was also raised in a number of conversations as a solution to security challenges, namely the need for women to take an increasing role in security leadership. The Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police have identified ‘diversifying their workforce’ as a key action needed to improve operational policing (Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police, 2020).

The youth bulge was considered a human security issue of high concern in Melanesia. The effects of low youth engagement/education/unemployment on law and order are strongly on the minds of some leaders, though practitioners from other parts of the Pacific did not raise youth as a security issue.

**Climate/Environmental security:** In the view of Pacific security practitioners, climate/environmental security covered a cluster of issues including climate resilience, disaster relief capacity, food security, and natural resource security (including fisheries). There was also widespread recognition of climate change as a systemic magnifier that is compounding a number of security issues in the domains of human and traditional security.

The Boe Declaration states that climate change remains the single greatest threat to the security and well-being of the peoples of the Pacific. Climate resilience was raised only a small number of times as a stand-alone issue. This was not because climate change is not inherently important, but because it was seen as a pervasive variable affecting all security issues. The low profile of climate security in our discussions also appears to reflect the significant amount of donor activity already occurring in this space. A number of security practitioners noted Pacific governments were experiencing ‘engagement fatigue’ on climate risk.

For a number of security practitioners, the focus was beyond climate risk to the vulnerability that a lack of humanitarian relief and disaster response (HADR) capacity has created for Pacific countries. Some practitioners noted the challenges of coordinating joint disaster relief/recovery efforts between an increasing number of actors, including police, defence, border services, health, agriculture, rural affairs, as well as some NGOs. Several practitioners noted that the combination of high vulnerability and coordination requirements had resulted in establishing the Pacific Humanitarian Protection Cluster, a unique United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA)–coordinated system that operates on a ‘permanent standby’ basis rather than only activating in disasters. Practitioners across the Pacific also emphasised the need – but also the challenges involved – to bring civil society into disaster relief efforts. At a regional level, the PICP Secretariat has identified HADR response capability in the 2020–24 PICP Strategic Plan as critical for implementing stronger security policy.

For the majority of Pacific security practitioners, food security was an element of climate resilience, disaster response, livelihood security, or biosecurity. A minority linked food security and food quality to the broader issue of health security. Fisheries is a crucial part of the security conversation given its place as a crucial source of national revenue for a number of Pacific states (primarily offshore fisheries) and food security (primarily coastal fisheries). However, there was limited discussion on fisheries in isolation during our consultations. Similar to climate security, the assumption is that fisheries are an environmental, transnational and livelihood security issue where Pacific countries are asserting their interests and are well served by extant partnerships to address and manage risks (Aqorau 2019).

**Traditional Security:** The Boe Declaration lists transnational crime and cyber security as traditional security challenges in need of attention. The additional high priority issue raised during the 2019 consultations by Pacific practitioners was border security. Rather than as a specific security challenge, geopolitical contest was commonly referred to as the increasingly difficult context for pursuing security and an opportunity to be leveraged.

The two pervasive transnational crime focal areas for practitioners were drug trafficking and human trafficking. Our conversations echoed academic concerns about the lack of quality data to measure the scale or impact of transnational crime in the Pacific (Chelliah and Prasad 2017; UNODC 2016). Practitioners in several Pacific states prioritised drug smuggling as a focus for law enforcement cooperation, however it was unclear what level of harm Pacific Islands states experienced as a result of the domestic spill over of trafficked drugs. A practitioner from an NGO working to counter people smuggling admitted the organisation has a number of programs in place in the Pacific that are based on anecdotal evidence, with limited understanding of the true drivers of human trafficking in the region. Despite these concerns, there was still confidence in regional agencies such as Pacific Transnational Crime

Coordination Centre, Forum Fisheries Agency, and the Pacific Community to address transnational crime.

**Cyber security** was regularly raised in consultations, but the capacity needs in this area were unclear. The recent or forthcoming connection of undersea cables to Pacific states were a major driver of cyber risk perception. Security practitioners considered the Pacific’s cyber security risks to be: financial crime and identity fraud; sexual exploitation; risks to large financial organisations; and political/social defamation via social media. Notably, practitioners focused their attention on the cyber risks facing the community (cyber safety) and not state sponsored cyber risks. One Pacific academic working on technology issues considered that the size of Pacific states and institutions, the limited ability to support national Computer Emergency Response Teams (CERTs), and limited computer science capabilities created a sustained vulnerability for the region. As a relatively unformed area of security response, cyber security may be an area ripe for regional cooperation and further assistance from donors.<sup>2</sup>

Pacific countries are approaching maritime and land border security with a range of objectives, including: asserting sovereignty and territorial integrity; addressing migration risks; mitigating transnational crime; managing health and biosecurity risks; and collecting revenue. Practitioners noted maritime and border security are issues of high donor interest and come with a volume of training/education offerings. Practitioners appeared to have a degree of confidence that these partnerships offered Pacific countries some of the resources needed to strengthen border capacity. However, there was some concern that having multiple partners could contribute to fragmentation, disconnect in systems, and conflict over access.

## A stronger Pacific security agenda

The Pacific is a crowded and complex space, but Pacific countries want to make the most of this moment of focus. The confidence from regional successes has percolated down to the individual security practitioner, resulting in an assertive security agenda. The uncertainty and volatility of the security environment has focused the conversation on skills development, particularly the soft skills of co-ordination and collaboration, combined with leadership in a time of uncertainty, and deeper analytic capacity.

There is a coherent conception of ‘Pacific security’ captured in the Boe Declaration. But the coherence should not be overstated as it butts up against national level diversity and complexity. Human security caused the most concern for practitioners, with climate/environmental security considered a pervasive and systemic driver of risk. Traditional security issues were of concern to Pacific leaders, but the level of harm arising from traditional security threats was difficult to quantify and there appeared to be greater confidence that these risks could be managed through partnerships.

Pacific Island countries and leaders were remarkably open and candid during PSC’s initial consultations. It is yet another example of the willingness of Pacific practitioners

to take charge of the conversation and shape the environment towards their interests and security outcomes. The security conversation will need to be sustained as a growing range of threats emerge in the Pacific, some of which are existential. Through the conversation, the people of the Pacific are shaping the response to their security challenges, and building the tools and relationships for a more resilient future.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> It was not all gloom on coordination. Pacific practitioners welcomed the re-establishment of a coordination mechanism at the regional level with the Pacific Islands Forum Official Sub-committee on Regional Security that was reactivated in 2019.
- <sup>2</sup> There are a number of donor initiatives already underway, such as Cyber Safety Pasifika funded by the Australian Federal Police <https://www.cybersafetypasifika.org/>

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# Achieving best practice through security cooperation: The Pacific way

*Jone Kalouniwai, Jack Moceica, Akuila Savu, Alipate Naulivou, National Security and Defence Council Secretariat, Fiji and Robert Styles, the Australian National University*

## Introduction

In a recent conversation with the National Security and Defence Council Secretariat in Fiji, Director of NSS Co-ordination and Monitoring Akuila Savu asked the question:

What will be the most effective forms of collective action we employ in response to COVID-19 that could be applied to the broader suite of security challenges we are facing now and into the future?

It immediately drew our attention! One thing led to another, and we are now working together to try and answer this question.

We are a consortium comprising the National Security and Defence Council Secretariat led by Brigadier General Jone Kalouniwai, the recently appointed Director-General; Director NSS Coordination and Monitoring Akuila Savu; Manager NSS Coordination and Monitoring Alipate Naulivou; and Jack Moceica, previously the Deputy Secretary of Defence and National Security. This core team is working in partnership with Associate Professor Robert Styles from the Australia Pacific Security College at the Australian National University.

Together we are working with representatives from a diverse mix of government agencies, NGOs, civil society and ethnic groups. We have embarked on a program of activities comprising an in-country, whole of government approach, with civil society dialogue and action research designed to enhance the country's capacity to implement the National Security Strategy and effectively impact human, environmental and contemporary security challenges, and to strengthen partnerships within the country and ultimately across the region. In this paper, we outline our understanding of the challenges we are aiming to impact and the 'Pacific way' in which we are pursuing our endeavours.

## Problems that beg a more adequate response

In the 21st century, the global population is facing some of the most intractable problems it has ever faced. Problems that beg for a more adequate response, today and into the future. For example, in the Pacific, as across the globe, we observe seasonal swings in the weather with drought, floods and storms causing major natural disasters that at their worst wreak death, famine, loss of livelihood, epidemics and displacement of populations, as well as vast losses of personal and state-owned property. Looking forward, the vast consensus of reputable scientific opinion (IEA 2019; IPCC 2014; NIC 2017) is that climate and related security issues will significantly worsen in the absence of a radical response. The most severe effects will likely be experienced in developing and least developed countries. In recognition of this fact, in 2018 all leaders of Pacific Island Forum

member countries outlined an extended security agenda (PIF 2018) where they articulated and agreed to the need to deal with the region's most pressing security issues.

Within Fiji, as in the rest of the region, the security environment is complex. The diverse and intractable nature of the security challenges we are facing represents a raft of significant transition challenges that we will have to tackle over coming decades. Further, the magnitude of this endeavour has been amplified as COVID-19 has exposed a lack of resilience as a result of a collective failure to assess and act on national risks and vulnerabilities. In this context, responding to our traditional and non-traditional security threats will mean addressing the lack of resilience across the country's governance, economic, environmental, public, energy and infrastructure systems. Further, this lack of resilience needs to be addressed at the personal, community, business and all levels of government. It is about being better prepared and having the ability and the will to act collaboratively whenever necessary.

We acknowledge that a shell-shocked society, with a ruined economy and depleted health system will need strong leaders at all levels, inside and outside of government, who can offer fresh and inspiring directions. *'Where to next?'* is the live question! Unless we can collectively learn how to answer this question, we will not be able to address the security risks and vulnerabilities in an integrated manner. This is the nature of our work – to help leaders, with their people, answer this question.

In Fiji, we are aiming for an integrated approach to national security inclusive of multiple actors that reinforces sovereignty and resilience at every level. This is a very complicated conversation to orchestrate! An approach that stands in stark contrast to the prevailing culture of 'telling' that has proven to have failed us collectively on many fronts. No progress will be achieved by trying to impose top-down expertise, as people are sick of experts. Rather than merely telling others what to do, our aim is to engage those we work with in a robust perspective-taking exercise; that is, *change the way they 'see' and 'listen' to their world now and into the future, and as a consequence shift the way they describe and act in relation to it – change the discourse and consequent action.* This is about having them re-authoring themselves in their world over time; having them strategically qualifying an array of choices, values, trade-offs and decisions that will impact over generations. At this juncture, there will be a very different array of options to those faced by previous generations, and that have affected our resilience today and into the future unless we change.

Our social economy will be critical in this endeavour. We are keen to ensure that Fiji's National Security Strategy adequately considers the human dimension. We must *manage for change through people*, rather than try to drive people to change. We see this as an essential role for both

government and community leaders. To help them take a more sophisticated approach than merely stating their case and expecting others to believe them. This goes for us as well. The experience of the last few years proves that facts do not stand on their own, e.g. the impact of climate change and the evidence does not necessarily persuade by itself. Indeed, the presentation of strong arguments often backfires and encourages people to disagree and resist even more strongly than they did before.

Suppose Fiji's National Security Strategy is going to orchestrate the behaviour of the system effectively. In that case, it needs to go beyond imported frameworks or off-the-shelf futures work and systems thinking to *systems doing*. This is a living process that requires a range of collaborative and experience platforms to sustain the activities of different communities of practice as they leverage the best of what has historically and culturally worked and apply it in new and innovative ways. This is naturally pulling for new governance arrangements. These are emerging and will continue to do so over time.

Further, the emerging strategies are being derived not to build 'bridges to nowhere' and generate short-term pay-offs that soon become debt-ridden stranded assets. Beginning with maritime and climate security, we are focusing on those sectors and qualified opportunities with a future. The custodians of these particular spaces are being engaged in authoring their future, based on what is intrinsically and environmentally important. Critically, younger people are being involved in this process as much as possible as they will ultimately inherit and evolve adaptation and prevention measures. In this way, our program of activities is providing mechanisms for these groups of groups to ask and answer: *What good ideas should be invested in? How can those ideas be worked to the benefit of all?*

## What is the Pacific way?

Our approach is about giving legitimacy and support to those responsible for a security challenge. It's about affording power and authority that builds in purpose to act with sovereignty and self-determination. This raises an important question: *how do we understand 'power-to' get things done?*

For our purposes, we recognise power to be, 'the capacity to mobilise resources to attend to needs' (Kashtan 2014:130). This definition of power suggests that we don't use power or authority for the sake of it, we use it to satisfy needs, either our own or those of others. This distinction is central to our endeavours in Fiji.

Power is, first of all, a capacity or ability or the potential to achieve specific outcomes by mobilising physical and cultural resources at our disposal. Second, power is the capacity to meet needs. *So, what are needs?* Within the context of our endeavours, needs refer to the most essential categories of what motivates us and what is necessary for life, not to the almost endless strategies of attending to those needs.

There are four basic categories of need – physical needs (e.g. food and shelter), freedom, connection and meaning.

These same four basic needs apply equally to the collective – environmental health (i.e. sustainable resources), sovereignty, partnership and shared purpose. Furthermore, needs are understood to be universal aspects of experience that apply to everyone irrespective of culture or circumstance (Deci and Ryan 2008; Rosenberg 2003). It is this latter characteristic that makes them so useful for our purposes. Focusing on needs automatically brings us towards a sense of shared identity and purpose. In this way, needs, along with purpose and values, define an essential aspect of what matters to us. Understanding what we need in this way can liberate us.

With these distinctions in mind, we have adopted an approach to decision making that is based on collecting all needs relevant to a decision and engaging stakeholders in converting them to practical strategies that can work for all, now and in the future. This approach is resulting in robust decisions that are less likely to be sabotaged by those carrying them out.

We believe that unless we consciously build our cultures and economies on direct caring for needs with an awareness of being always part of a larger whole, we are likely to continue to increase the suffering of people and the environment. A direct and insistent focus on needs can provide a blueprint for creating economies and lifestyles that nurture life.

In this way, by exercising power-with others (versus power-over), including the protective use of force – force that is used to protect life, not to punish, shame, or hurt anyone – as part of our effort, it is shifting the focus from 'what's in it for me' to 'what matters to us (including me)'. This shift in focus from the individual to relationship and community is catalysing a rewiring of community and relationship back into our lives, undoing the ravages of capitalism. This is the Pacific way!

## Our first steps on this journey

During these times of rapid disruption, particularly with COVID-19, we are experiencing novel opportunities for change. To capitalise on this moment, we have actively foregrounded the need to be creative, to imagine new futures and seek ways to enable the Fijian Government and people to innovate together, not only to tackle the challenges of today but also to sow the seeds of a better world for future generations. Most importantly, doing it the Pacific way means we have put our people and their needs centre stage. Together, we are taking this as an opportunity to revolutionise how we listen, think and act.

The first thing we did was to design an entry plan. A carefully sequenced set of 20 interviews and inquiry activities with key stakeholders from across the Fiji maritime sector followed by a two-day structured deliberation involving over 70 representatives from 22 different institutions. This approach has demonstrated that gaining trust and credibility, and ultimately leading an organisation or system to improved performance, follows from a formal, planned, hit-the-ground-learning approach. This is contrasted with informal, ad hoc, hit-the-ground-running approaches typically taken.

This process catalysed a two-way, collaborative interaction aimed at examining and understanding the nature of current practice and formulating priorities for the future, those most effective forms of collective action. Our enquiry sought to understand the sector and people; what they care about and how they think and feel about their work and role within the system; whether they think the system is headed in the right direction and pursuing that direction in the right way; whether or not the system is working so together they can engage in fixing it; and, their expectations for leadership. The question that gave the secretariat *raison d'être* or *Yavu*<sup>1</sup> for this program was:

*Vaka cokotaki ni vei Tabana Vaka Matanitu* – What characteristics or current institutional practices (both government and non-government) would provide a degree of credibility to the implementation of a whole of government approach?

By following this discipline of systematically sharing carefully collected data and interpretations publicly instead of keeping them private, we were able to invite those we engaged with to experience the same confrontation with complex reality. The resulting collective reflection on current practice set the stage for new thinking that is now leading to new behaviour.

The system we engaged with is being referred to in the Fijian vernacular as *Yavusa*.<sup>2</sup> Within the *Yavusa* resides a number of sub-systems or *Mataqali*,<sup>3</sup> each having its own strategic centre of gravity,<sup>4</sup> i.e. a source of power that provides moral or physical strength, freedom of action, or will to act. It became apparent that should each *Mataqali*'s centre of gravity be correctly positioned within the broader security domain, or *Yavusa*, each *Mataqali*, comprising a suite of agencies, or *Tokatokas*,<sup>5</sup> would likely choose to cooperate. Within each *Mataqali*, should there be an understanding of each agency or *Tokatoka*'s respective statutory roles, collaborative effort would be enhanced as they undertook national security preventative initiatives.

Based on our enquiries we inferred the systems' centre of gravity, a traditional characteristic, *Vanua*,<sup>6</sup> was significantly impacting the decision-making processes within and between the various *Tokatokas* or agencies, and their capacity for multi-agency cooperation. The challenge was to align the systems *Vanua* so it would reinforce a whole of government approach to security. In the Fijian vernacular:

- *Vaka rokoroko* – Respect, encouraging organisational bureaucracy. This manifests as rigid policies, hierarchical structures, centralised processes, no flexibility to out-source, delegation, top down approaches and a lack of new ideas. Our response was to create an epiphany (by discussing the benefits of new ideas and tools available) – *Vei Vaka Dodonu Taki*.
- *Ririko* – Hesitation, a reluctance to share information. This manifests as sophisticated information systems, security clearances, restrictions, and a lack of awareness outside one's own jurisdiction and broader spheres of responsibility. Our response was to create a wider sense of awareness outside each specific agency foci of interest linked to their specific challenges, link them to the outside world – *Vei Vakaramatki*.

- *Ka Makawa* – Old/expired/past, linked to archaic policies. This manifests as old school leadership, a lack of confidence and reluctance to change. Our response was to create a deep desire for change, to advocate change management – *Veisau ni Vakarau*.
- *Duidui Vakasama* and *Veiliutaki Mataboko* – Different understanding and blind leadership contributing to lacking a sense of purpose and a diverse range of interests. This manifests as a lack of purpose, lack of necessary investment, lack of coordination, and not purpose driven. Our response was to create a sense of purpose – *Veiliutaka Matata*.
- *Sega na veivakabauti* – A lack of trust, lacking appreciation to invest in the multi-agency response mechanisms. This manifests as a lack of political will and communication breakdowns. Our response was to maintain an open and credible channel of communication, encourage information sharing, dialogue and networking – *Veiwasei*.

Interestingly, not only did this structured enquiry illicit insights and catalyse strategically motivated multi-stakeholder activity, these *Vanua* characteristics framed a general program logic for the secretariat's engagements. The quality of dialogue and level of connection positioned the secretariat to become the preferred partner of choice. It is recognised as being able to provide sound intelligence and policy advice; build the capacity of the system by facilitating multi-agency engagements, workshops, joint working group meetings, consultations and networking activities; reliably assist and support agencies as they comprehensively responded to security issues; and drive the Government of Fiji's National Security Agenda through coordinated whole of government approaches to national security.

The two-day marine awareness multi-stakeholder deliberations took the form of a structured tabletop exercise on disaster preparedness. An activity that took participants through the process of dealing with four simulated disaster scenarios: oil spill, illegal fishing, civil unrest, and search and rescue. Each scenario was intentionally linked to the Fijian maritime domain and had a cascading impact on all aspects of the sea, air and land operating environments. How did it go? Reportedly, 'The results were just amazing. Everyone – meaning all the 22 agencies after having been introduced to the roles, functions and challenges of every participating agency in the initial two days – was empowered with a greater sense of awareness of how they can respond with each other in an emerging opportunity.'

Over the two days, a huge amount of information was exchanged. The deliberations not only included the key maritime agencies of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ports Authorities Fiji, Fiji Navy and border security agencies, but also extended to include iTaukei Affairs, Rural Development, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Fishing and others. Those involved learned the importance of looking beyond their individual agency boundaries, to flexibly coordinate their effort, appreciate the availability of other agency's capabilities and deploy technologies to fill capability gaps and deficiencies. The tabletop exercise increased their awareness of the complexity of various challenges at all levels of the security system. The planning

process and decisions employed during the exercise created an epiphany among these agencies.

Significantly, there was an appreciation of the value of information sharing; the identification of various policies, protocols and existing platforms available to the system; and the identification of critical gaps and deficiencies lacking in individual organisations during the various stages of a security response. Participating agencies successfully evaluated the applicability of their standard operating procedures and respective capabilities such that they were able to identify opportunities for interoperability. The system's capacity, once coordinated, was recognised to be a credible multi-agency response mechanism. This approach to multi-stakeholder deliberation is now becoming the forerunner of a government and non-government decision-making and planning process.

## Conclusion

This experience has taught us that learning together to understand the emerging dynamics and complexities of the ecosystem is fundamental to any multi-stakeholder planning and risk mitigation measure. We aimed to design and make available tailor-made learning and collaboration platforms for those actors we worked with, the first responders to emerging issues. By empowering those involved to act in a more coordinated manner, we observed them gain control of, and successfully manage their responses to the emerging strategic complexities and subsequently reduce exposure to risks.

Critically, we learned that when we embed ourselves within a group with a sense of shared purpose, we become part of an emergent field of exploration rather than a solitary cog in the system. This is about the Pacific way and is especially so when, within whatever community we find ourselves, we rise to the immensely challenging task of finding the willingness and capacity to share more emotional and material risks, liberating ourselves bit by bit from being islands of independence struggling to satisfy our basic needs. By sharing our valuable resources in the service of meeting our collective needs as human beings, we can navigate our differences, deepen our freedom, create and attend to our systems of agreements, and much more.

This endeavour has affirmed how effectively the Fiji National Security Strategy can respond to prevailing and expected traditional and non-traditional security threats, and in lieu of the Government of Fiji's agenda, how the National Security Defence Council Secretariat can approach whole of government governance and capability requirements for strategy implementation. We have begun learning what a home-grown prototype design and potential response mechanism for our secretariat will look like.

In this way, our lives and work have become a living experiment in truth, rather than a codified set of practices

that we are trying to pass on as 'the way to do things', which usually happens in traditional approaches to capacity building. As we move forward with our endeavours in Fiji, we have more trust that this approach will continue to pull us out of our social conditioning and into laying micro-foundations for a social infrastructure for the future.

## Notes

- 1 *Yavu*: Purpose, foundational belief for existence.
- 2 *Yavusa*: Fijian traditional clan system comprising multiple clans with varying responsibilities, dependent on each other for their coordinated survival against other rival Yavusas.
- 3 *Mataqali*: A single clan system (agency) consisting of various families (agency departments).
- 4 Centre of gravity: The characteristics, capabilities, or locations from which a system or organisation derives its freedom, physical strength, and will to take action. At the strategic level, centres of gravity might include traditional security systems, an alliance or multi-agency organisation, a set of critical capabilities or function, or a national strategy itself.
- 5 *Tokatoka*: A nuclear family system that extends throughout the patriarchal lineage of a family.
- 6 *Vanua*: A reference to a strong sense of traditional ethics that characterise loyalty, humility, obedience, meekness and respect.

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## Networked security: Public police, private security and the changing shape of security governance in Papua New Guinea

*Sinclair Dinnen and Grant W Walton, The Australian National Introduction*

### Introduction

COVID-19 has highlighted the shortcomings of diverse aspects of government systems across the globe. As well as the enormous pressures placed on health sectors, a spotlight has also been shone on the national security agencies and, in particular, police organisations tasked with enforcing the raft of emergency regulations and measures introduced in response to the pandemic in many countries. In the Pacific Islands, this has placed new stresses on small police forces, some of which are seriously under-resourced and struggle to fulfil their normal workload, let alone taking on a range of additional responsibilities.

The current predicament presents an opportunity to reflect more broadly on security governance in the rapidly changing Pacific Islands region and to consider what other possibilities exist to enable these countries better meet their policing needs. While the importance of security to development is well understood by governments and international donors, security sector reform remains narrowly focused on public security services, notably police and military. Private security continues to be largely absent from reform debates despite its prominence globally and regionally. In this paper we build on an earlier paper (Dinnen 2017) that drew attention to the dramatic growth of private security in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and its significant role in that country's security landscape. Drawing on interviews with key stakeholders conducted between June 2019 and February 2020, this paper provides an update of PNG's private security sector in light of other changes that have taken place in recent years. The latter includes growing public discontent with police performance and an apparent commitment to reform on the part of a new generation of government and police leaders.

Our consideration of private security and its intersections with the police and other security actors also seeks to broaden the lens on security provision and emphasise its essentially networked character in a country like PNG. Such a perspective also strives to shift attention beyond a narrow preoccupation with the *police* as a discrete organisation, which is the traditional focus of governments and donors. Instead, we adopt a broader concern with *policing* as a set of functions or organised activities intended to promote and enhance safety and security. Policing, in this more expansive rendition, includes the actions of a range of actors whether government, private sector or, indeed, community-based, operating as part of a larger and dynamic network of security providers. A key feature of networked security is its fluid and dynamic shape and the interconnectedness between its constituent parts. Rather than hard divisions between, for example, public police and private security, or state and non-state providers, there is considerable overlap and interdependence between them in practice.

### A time for reform?

PNG Prime Minister James Marape, who assumed office in May 2019, appointed Bryan Kramer, member for Madang Open as the country's new police minister in a move that surprised many. Soon after his appointment, Kramer promised to reform PNG's police force – the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (RPNGC). The one-time member of the opposition and outspoken critic of the former O'Neill government outlined a range of measures including providing more opportunities for women, addressing corruption and improving discipline in the force. He has also encouraged citizens to report crime and police misdeeds through social media.



The reformist momentum is also highlighted by a cadre of younger officers who appear genuinely committed to improving the standing of the organisation with the broader public by tackling longstanding issues of ill-discipline and brutality. Prominent among them was the former Police Commissioner, David Manning, who was vocal about the need to clean up the RPNGC, including ridding it of what he calls ‘criminals in uniform’ (Post-Courier 2020).

While the reforms promised by Minister Kramer and former Police Commissioner Manning are encouraging, improving policing and security in what is often depicted as one of the world’s most insecure countries will not be easy. The RPNGC remains massively understaffed, poorly resourced and heavily factionalised. PNG’s current police-to-population ratio – 1:1,145 – is significantly below the UN recommended level of 1:450. According to a recent study for the PNG–Australia Policing Partnership, the RPNGC faces an average recurrent funding gap of K126 million (A\$50.8m) per annum and would require a one-off injection of approximately K3.9 billion (A\$1.6bn) to enable it to deliver its service mandate (Deloitte 2020:5). Corruption within the force is another major problem. Kramer recently posted that on becoming Police Minister:

I found our Police Force in complete disarray and riddled with corruption. The very organisation that was tasked with fighting corruption had become the leading agency in acts of corruption. Add to that a culture of police ill-discipline and brutality’ (Doherty 2020).

Even if reforms can improve the performance and standing of the organisation, the country’s serious fiscal crisis, accentuated by the current global pandemic, means that reformers will also need to look beyond the RPNGC to find answers to PNG’s security problems. One possible place to start looking will be PNG’s private security industry.

## PNG’s private security industry: Growth and regulation

As anyone who has visited PNG in recent years can attest, the private security industry is ubiquitous and booming. Office buildings are often only accessible by passing rolls of sharp barbed wire, pointed fences and uniformed guards with large caps. Many who work for donors, international NGOs or foreign embassies move from one secure compound in cars tracked by security companies that deliver them to another well-guarded fortress.

The potential for abuses of power on the part of private security actors renders effective regulation essential. As the industry has grown, so too have stories of violence, theft and other misdeeds by security personnel, albeit not on the scale of transgressions attributed to the police. When it comes to regulating private security, PNG is something of a regional leader as it was the first Pacific Island country to attempt to regulate its private security sector and is currently one of only three countries in the region (along with Tonga and Fiji) to have enacted dedicated legislation for this purpose.

The *Security (Protection) Industry Act 2004* provided for the establishment of the Security Industries Authority

(SIA). Set up in 2006, the SIA has now been in existence for 14 years. Its functions under the Act include:

- granting operating licences and guard permits to security companies;
- specifying minimum standards of training and approving training facilities;
- approving security equipment other than firearms;
- ensuring that companies and guards operate in accordance with their licences and permits; and
- drafting a Code of Conduct covering discipline and work ethics in the industry.

This all sounds good in theory, however, the SIA faces a number of formidable challenges in practice. First, the agency only provides licences – and thus provides an ostensive level of regulation – to a relatively small proportion of firms. Although SIA figures from 2017 estimated that there were 219 unlicensed security companies with around 7649 security guards operating illegally, unofficial estimates from industry sources put the number of illegal operators as substantially higher than this with some suggesting up to 80 per cent of companies are operating without licences or permits. Where the SIA identifies unlicensed companies, it refers them to the Internal Revenue Commission (PNG’s tax authority) as these companies are failing to pay a 10 per cent VAT component that is payable on licence and permit fees.

Despite the SIA only covering a small proportion of the industry, it has tried to increase the number of licensed private companies. Figure 1 shows a significant jump in the number of licensed security companies between 2013 and 2014 that, according to the SIA, resulted in part, from their efforts to track down unlicensed security companies.

Figure 1: Number of licensed security companies in PNG\*

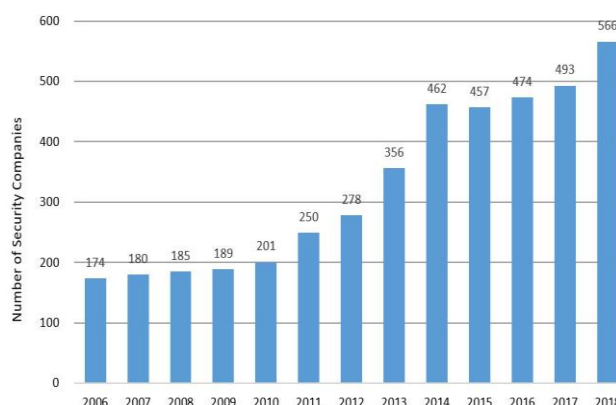


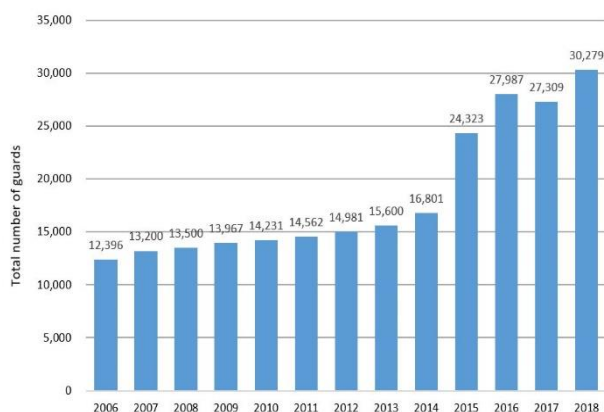
Figure adapted from Isari 2019

While the number of licensed companies has remained relatively similar over the past five years (the increase in 2018 is likely due to the enhanced security for APEC and associated construction boom in Port Moresby) the SIA hopes to increase the number of licensed companies. In

turn, it has recently opened an office in Lae (comprising two inspectors, a driver and a secretary) that is expected to cover the Momase and Highlands regions.

The SIA has a strong incentive to issue more licences: it gets to keep the fees from each company and security guard it registers. Given the profits to be made in the industry, fees are low, although they still provide the SIA with significant funding. For example, a licence for a company with over 200 employees that provides extensive security services – including armed guards and guard dogs, as well as armed escort for payroll and cash-in-transit – costs K11,000 (A\$4700) per year. In addition to their licence fees, companies are charged K22 (A\$8.90) for permits for each security guard they employ. The growth of licensed security companies and guards provides an important stream of revenue for the SIA; in 2018 it licensed over 30,000 guards – a figure that has almost doubled since 2014 (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Number of licensed security guards in PNG\*



\* Figure adapted from Isari 2019

Despite this income, as with many other areas of state regulation in PNG, the biggest practical challenge with this regulatory framework remains the extremely limited capacity of the SIA to fulfil its designated duties. It operates out of a rundown former police building in Badili, in downtown Port Moresby, and is headed by a registrar, currently a former senior police lawyer. The SIA has a staff of around 14 people, which include four regional security inspectors who are each responsible for one of PNG's four regions (Momase, Highlands, New Guinea Islands and Southern). The New Guinea Islands and Southern regions are serviced from Port Moresby. These resources are woefully inadequate given the rapid rate of growth of the industry. It is simply not realistic to expect one inspector to regulate the industry in each of PNG's four extensive and topographically challenging regions.

It is not surprising that many security experts express frustration that the SIA is not living up to its mandate. For example, many bemoan the lack of or inadequate training for security guards, as well as the SIA's limited powers of enforcement in the face of non-compliant operators. There is, perhaps, a glimmer of light at the end of this poorly regulated tunnel. Amendments to the Security (Protection) Industries Act have been proposed by the SIA to cater for

technological developments in the industry such as the growth of electronic security, and surveillance and tracking technology, to extend regulation to foreign security consultants and advisers working in PNG, to increase fees, and to empower the regulator to prosecute offending companies. While these amendments are welcome, implementing them is likely to prove challenging. This is particularly because many believe the weakly regulated nature of the industry benefits many PNG elites (including politicians) who have financial and other interests in this expanding and highly profitable industry.

Internationally, there also exist a number of voluntary codes and agreements that provide another potential source of regulation for private security companies. These instruments are intended to supplement State legal oversight of private security providers in the countries where they operate. The most relevant is the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Providers (ICoC) launched in 2010 (Buzatu 2015). The code is articulated in terms of human rights principles, including in areas such as use of force, detention, identification and registration, personnel vetting, record keeping, weapons management and training, and incident reporting. It was designed to apply in complex security environments, such as post-conflict or following natural disasters, where the domestic capabilities are limited. While primarily drafted with private military contractors in mind, membership of ICoC is open to different kinds of private security companies. An International Code of Conduct Association was established in 2013 as a mechanism to provide independent governance and oversight of member companies. Members of the Association comprise private security companies, civil society organisations and states. Its main tasks are:

- the certification of companies under the code;
- human-rights-oriented monitoring of company performance; and
- supporting member companies to address claims alleging violations of the code.

While development of transnational forms of regulation such as ICoC remain at a relatively early stage, the most obvious limitation with such codes is their voluntary character. Other sceptics point to the risk of such mechanisms becoming dominated by powerful industry interests (MacLeod 2015). On a more optimistic note, membership of ICoC can also become a valued mark of differentiation in a notoriously competitive industry, whereby companies can flaunt their membership of this global framework as a sign of quality assurance to competitors and, significantly, potential clients. In this regard, the United Nations now require membership of ICoC as a mandatory requirement for the hiring of private security providers by UN agencies. It is likely that other international organisations and governments will follow. Guard Dog Security (GDS), PNG's largest nationally-owned security company, achieved membership of ICoC in 2020, becoming the first local company in the Pacific Islands region to do so. Its membership is now prominently displayed on the company website. In a recent interview with the authors, the GDS Chief Executive Officer indicated that becoming a member highlighted and

reinforced the company's stature and reputation as an industry leader in PNG and the broader region.

## Networked security in Papua New Guinea

With its notoriously under-resourced and thinly-spread police force, researchers Craig and Porter 2018; Walton and Dinnen 2019; Forsyth and Hukula 2019 have argued that innovative responses to Papua New Guinea's security problems are needed. Much of this analysis has focused on the importance of unofficial policing coalitions of State and community-based actors that operate in many parts of the country (Craig and Porter 2018; Forsyth and Hukula 2019). Given the resources available to PNG's booming private security sector, we argue that they constitute another key node in these networks of security providers and below briefly indicate the intersections between these private firms and other security actors and organisations.

**Private security and the police:** A close and increasingly interdependent relationship already exists between the police and elements of the private security industry and is most evident in PNG's main urban centres. The larger companies are involved in many of the same kinds of policing activity as their uniformed colleagues, including crime prevention, investigations and responding to incidents. Senior company managers often have police backgrounds and maintain strong networks within the RPNGC. Some companies are reputedly owned by retired senior police officers, and there are rumours that some serving officers have active interests in particular firms. Although not as prevalent as in a country like South Africa (which is often looked to for its extensive experience of private security and serious security challenges), some company employees are also reserve constables in the police, wearing uniforms and exercising the same powers as regular officers in this part-time capacity.

Relationships between individuals in the private sector and the police are widely acknowledged as mutually beneficial. Some larger operators provide food, help buy uniforms, supply fuel and maintenance for police vehicles, and, sometimes, allowances when working together. Informal networks facilitate critical intelligence sharing. Superior resources available to high-end private operators include sophisticated communications, surveillance and tracking systems that are unavailable to the RPNGC. It is a two-way street. Private providers are also reliant on police support when they apprehend suspected offenders or face violent confrontations in the course of their work. However, relationships between these two groups can occasionally deteriorate, with some industry insiders recounting instances of confrontation, sometimes violent, between the RPNGC and private security.

**Private security and communities:** While private security firms provide their services for a fee, more established operators seek to maintain strong and enduring relationships with their surrounding communities. Again, there is a powerful element of self-interest and mutual benefit. In urban contexts, firms want a secure base from which to

operate from and where many of their employees reside. We know of one security operator that delivers community awareness around security issues and provides water to the adjoining settlement during times of drought. Some companies provide sports equipment to local youth. Surrounding communities are also an important source of criminal intelligence and potential recruits.

While the character of relationships vary within and between urban centres, different dynamics are evident in interactions between communities and security companies in rural areas. This is particularly so in the case of landowner-owned security firms working around extractive, usually mining, projects. While offering potentially lucrative rewards and a welcome source of employment in underdeveloped regions, the kinship and other ties binding such companies and the communities in which they operate can lead to social complexities and challenges not encountered in the more heterogeneous and impersonal urban setting. For example, the employment of fellow tribesmen/women can make disciplining and managing employees difficult. As a result, some landowner security companies chose to partner with international or other 'outside' firms to help manage these issues.

**Private security and politicians:** It is widely believed that members of the political elite are strongly invested in the private security industry. For example, MP for Lae Open, John Rosso, is a reserve police chief sergeant and owner of Executive Security Services (ESS), with a current workforce of over 1500. Rosso started ESS before he became an MP in 2017. While social media is awash with rumours connecting PNG's politicians, including former Prime Minister Peter O'Neill, to particular security firms, the exact number and nature of the connections are often hazy. However, there is no doubt that owning a security company can aid some political hopefuls. Employing large numbers of constituents can help guarantee votes, particularly in areas with few other employment opportunities.

Some claim politically aligned firms are more likely to receive government contracts. It is also likely that firms involving politicians are more likely to be paid as MPs are in a better position to squeeze money out of an increasingly cash-strapped government than others. Indeed, our conversations indicate that many private security firms without political connections refuse to bid for government contracts because they worry they won't get paid. On the other hand, political instability can mean companies that are closely aligned with political powerbrokers risk losing their advantage, with changes in government and political leadership contributing to the noticeable fluctuations in the fortunes of a number of well-known companies.

**Networks within and between private security companies:** The array of private security firms in PNG vary considerably in size, services offered and the geographic spread of their operations. They range from small-scale local companies with one car and a few guards through to substantial multinational companies with a global reach. The latter can draw on an impressive array of transnational ideas, resources and cutting-edge technologies. For example,

G4S Secure Solutions (PNG) is part of the largest security company and one of the top three private sector employers in the world with over 570,000 employees globally and contracted sales of over US\$9.76 billion (A\$13.40bn) in 2019 alone (Bizvibe 2020).

While transnational connections within companies can shape security provision, relationships between private firms operating within the country can be fractious. There are occasional attempts to encourage information sharing and cooperation; however, private security firms are often fiercely competitive. We have heard numerous accounts of physical altercations involving guards from rival firms. This can happen when a business or government department replaces one security firm with another. When guards from the ousted security company lose their job, some take their frustrations out on the newly employed guards.

In sum, while many think of private and state security as separate, our preliminary findings suggest that the private sector is thoroughly integrated within PNG's broader security network. It is this broader network, comprising ever-shifting relations between different providers that determines the nature of security governance in PNG. In turn, if we are to move beyond the same old approach to police support that has been relied upon for the past three decades with singularly modest results we need to begin by acknowledging and responding to the networked reality of security provision in PNG.

### **Are private security firms the answer to crime in PNG?**

While acknowledging the importance of private security firms for PNG's security landscape, there are three key challenges in attempting to engage with private security organisations. First, private providers are highly exclusionary. The industry is most visible in PNG's rapidly growing towns and cities where government, business, and private wealth are concentrated. PNG's prolonged natural resources boom in recent years has been a catalyst for growth, with a number of companies also operating in rural areas where the major extractive projects are located. PNG's hosting of APEC in 2018 provided another major, albeit temporary, boost to the industry. As illustrated by the Paladin case, Australia's off-shore detention facilities on Manus Island have been a particularly lucrative opportunity for a succession of private security companies (Knaus and Davidson 2019). In other words, these providers currently privilege powerful state and business interests over the security of ordinary citizens. Re-incentivising private providers to improve public security will not be easy and, indeed, might prove to be an insurmountable challenge.

Second, as we have outlined the industry is poorly regulated. As well as reputable companies, both foreign and locally-owned, the industry has attracted its fair share of cowboys and fly-by-night operators. PNG presents a particularly challenging environment for those companies that strive to operate by the stated rules. Fierce political rivalries and nepotism play a significant role in decision-making

around the allocation of government and other major contracts. The more established companies strive to do the right thing and have been lobbying government for a more transparent and effective regulatory framework. For others, however, playing by the unspoken rules of the political game remains a more attractive and profitable option.

Finally, although extensive interaction between police and private security occurs in practice, there are concerns around encouraging further collaboration. These include sensitivities about private providers encroaching further on areas that many believe should remain the exclusive preserve of public police; concerns that the growing prominence of private providers diverts attention away from the need to strengthen the police; and perceptions that public-private security collaborations tend to privilege business interests over those of ordinary citizens.

While there are many potential risks, policymakers would benefit from better understanding this burgeoning sector. As attested by its global growth, private security is here to stay. In acknowledging the inherently plural character of security provision in PNG, policymakers should explore whether the strengths within the private security industry might compensate for the weakness of the RPNGC, and vice versa. For example, PNG's police could benefit from better access to the resources, skills, technology and intelligence of large private security companies. The RPNGC and private firms already cooperate informally. Could the industry and government develop regulatory and operational frameworks that allow police and private firms to work together under certain circumstances, with mutual benefit for both?

Ultimately, our focus needs to be on improving security outcomes for all Papua New Guineans, including its most vulnerable citizens. While seeking to strengthen the struggling police remains a critical priority, exploring other options in PNG's fluid and changing security landscape should not be denied because of a narrow devotion to one institutional form.

### **Conclusion**

While PNG's law and order challenges are long-standing, the COVID-19 pandemic and changes to the country's security leadership provides an opportunity to rethink the country's security landscape. Drawing on preliminary conversations with PNG-based security companies, we suggest the role of private providers in PNG's networked security landscape will be crucial for reframing more effective and sustainable approaches to improving security provision in the country. Despite challenges around regulation, both national and transnational, and the sometimes fractious relationships between private security organisations and others, there is potential for greater and strategic collaboration between the private security industry, police and community organisations. The question now is how to best support these collaborations in ways that are low risk and provide greater security for PNG's population, particularly the poor and marginalised.

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# Transnational and organised crime in Pacific Island Countries and Territories: Police capacity to respond to the emerging security threat

*Danielle Watson, Queensland University of Technology, Jose Luis Sousa-Santos, Massey University and Loene M Howes, University of Tasmania*

Transnational and organised crime is supported by complex and multilayered networks that are mobile, well-resourced, and strategically coordinated, enabling them to operate across international borders (Dandurand 2007, Le Mièrre 2011) and making them a major threat to global security (Goldsmith and Sheptycki 2007, UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC 2016). Many argue that such crimes are primarily opportunistic, facilitated by global connectivity and the potential for large profit margins (Madsen 2009). The perpetrators may assess opportunities for profit against the risks of detection, investigation, and prosecution by local, regional and international law enforcement agencies. In doing so, they weigh the perceived capabilities and limitations of such agencies and their likely willingness – or reluctance – to engage in complex and costly transnational investigations (Dandurand 2007, Williams and Godson 2002).

Dialogue among scholars and practitioners about transnational and organised crime in Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) often only scratches the surface of the multifaceted nature of the threat posed to many small countries in the Pacific. PICTs are characterised by large geographic areas largely of ocean, porous maritime borders, and relatively small populations scattered across multiple islands. For criminal enterprises, the relatively low risks of detection of transnational and organised crime in this environment, along with its profitability, contribute to the growing attractiveness of the region as a potential crime hub.

Adding to these challenges, policing organisations in many PICTs are often under resourced (McLeod 2009). The complexity of transnational and organised crime makes it notoriously difficult to detect, monitor, investigate and respond effectively to the illegal activities involved even for well-resourced police organisations. In PICTs, the challenges are exacerbated by the vast geographic expanses of ocean and the limited resources available for patrolling it. For many PICTs, the legal systems are not well equipped to deal with the magnitude or types of crimes taking place within their jurisdictions (Schloenhardt 2009). Some crime classifications are yet to be included in local legislation, further limiting the extent to which they can be adequately addressed. Organisations thus encounter myriad challenges in their attempts to mount appropriate responses to new and emerging threats. Dialogue at the regional level has raised questions about the response capacity of security service providers – including customs, immigration, and police – to deal with current and emerging transnational and organised crime threats. This paper considers the nature of the threats, existing legislation, policing resources and Pacific specific approaches to capacity development. We conclude that, to be most effective, capacity development must be led by the

PICTs and undertaken in light of a nuanced understanding of existing capacities and limitations within the region.

## The threat of transnational and organised crime in the Pacific

Limited data exist on transnational and organised crime in the Pacific region. However, available sources suggest several prominent areas of concern, including: environmental crimes related to illegal fishing and resource extraction; sex trafficking, which is associated with resource extraction industries, such as logging; and trafficking in illicit drugs and their precursor chemicals (UNODC 2016). News reports suggest that shipments of illicit drugs facilitated by mafia style groups and destined for the ‘lucrative markets’ of Australia and New Zealand are finding their way into PICTs (see Lyons 2019), leading to forecasts of increased drug use (including of methamphetamines), financial crimes, organised motorcycle gangs, deported individuals with a history of criminal activities outside of their home country, and cybercrime (Holloway 2020).

## Legislation around transnational and organisational crime

The sanctioning of key international legal instruments and alignment of domestic legislation with these instruments has been identified as key to addressing transnational and organised crime across the Pacific region (UNODC 2016). A key turning point in recognising the need for new legislation occurred in 2004 in Fiji when a multinational investigation – Operation Outrigger – culminated in the seizure of the largest drug manufacturing lab in the Southern Hemisphere. The lab had been established in Fiji by members of the triad gang – reportedly from Hong Kong and Malaysia – to produce purified methamphetamine, or ‘ice’ (Sunday 2005). The lab premises contained extremely volatile chemicals and reportedly had a potential explosion radius of up to 300 metres (ibid) – demonstrating the need for updated legislation to address the banning of precursor chemicals as well as the drugs that they produce. Fiji is reviewing its Illicit Drug Control Act, which will be presented to Parliament in 2020/21 alongside a National Narcotics Strategy that seeks to address the social and economic harms related to drug trafficking and usage in Fiji (Kumar 2020).

Country specific legislative capacities differ and, for many PICTs, legislative reform remains a work in progress. In 2016, Papua New Guinea (PNG) customs officers publicly raised concerns about the inability of the PNG’s law enforcement agencies to prosecute drug cases in PNG due to weak legislation. Financial, administrative and staff



challenges have prevented the development of national drug control measures in PNG – among the PICTs in which the possession and supply of some synthetic drugs and their precursors is not criminalised (UNODC 2016). Support has been provided to engage in necessary legislative reform. For example, in PNG, a Controlled Substance Bill was drafted in 1998 with the assistance of a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) advisor. The bill was not, however, adopted.

The extent to which governments and organisations prioritise addressing transnational and organised crime differs across the region. In some instances, reforming legislation to address transnational and organised crime is not a priority – perceived as an externally imposed, rather than an internal concern. The non-prioritisation and low prioritisation of transnational and organised crime at the government level impacts on policing policies and the organisational capacity to respond. In some jurisdictions, this means these crimes are not yet formally identified in legislation, constraining law enforcement officers' abilities to respond. For example, online fraud is categorised as theft for immediate response purposes. The Cyber Safety Pasifika program aims to address this issue by increasing police capacity to enforce laws and investigate and prosecute relevant crimes (AFP, 2018). The program also aims to strengthen legislation in line with international standards (AFP 2018, Cyber Safety Pasifika 2019).

## **Police organisations: Resource considerations**

PICT police organisations are a primary subset of each country's security apparatus. All PICTs have police services or forces that are affiliated with other internal and external bodies and employ a multilayered approach to transnational and organised crime involving local, regional, and international partners working across multiple agencies. Existing local and regional networks include: 28 locally staffed Transnational Crime Units (TCUs) in 20 PICTs (AFP 2019); the Transnational, Serious and Organised Crime (TSOC) Pacific Taskforce; the Pacific Transnational Crime Network (PTCN); and the Pacific Transnational Crime Coordination Centre (PTCCC). These regional networks are supported by Australia and New Zealand. Additionally, the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police partner with organisations such as Oceania Customs Organisation, the Pacific Immigration Development Community, the Pacific Islands Law Officers Network, the Asia-Pacific Group on Money Laundering, and the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency. This proliferation of agencies suggests the necessary architecture is in place to support increased cooperation on transnational and organised crime and the strong need for partnerships. The contextual applicability of the edict for these agencies, their legitimacy among intended stakeholders and the extent to which they are able to operate as intended are, however, likely to vary.

The existence of multiple agencies focused on the same or closely related issues may, however, reflect a duplication of efforts and resources and may strain already limited or scarce resources. The scarcity of resources highlights a

need for better efforts and coordination of agencies – and improved cooperation and collaboration – to increase chances of effectively addressing transnational and organised crime. Compounding these challenges is the substantial gap in information on transnational crime in the Pacific (UNODC 2016) which in turn inhibits development of evidence based approaches to prioritise the allocation of limited resources.

Despite the challenges of creating effective regional partnerships, the need to do so has been strongly affirmed and reinforced by the member countries of the Pacific Islands Forum. The Boe Declaration on Regional Security cites transnational crime – along with human security, environmental and resource security, and cybersecurity – as four key challenges to the Pacific (PIFS 2018). The Boe Declaration and associated Action Plan adopted by the member countries of the Pacific Islands Forum align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (specifically SDGs 8, 14,15,16) that address enhanced cooperation, information and intelligence sharing – between law enforcement at both national and regional levels – and the ratification and implementation of relevant international conventions on transnational crime such as the Palermo Convention. The Boe Declaration and Action Plan also propose strengthening anti-money laundering mechanisms and combating corruption by public officials.

Cooperation and information sharing across agencies remains, however, a work in progress. Some smaller countries have reported a one sided arrangement favouring larger and better resourced partners. Joint operations between national jurisdictions can become an exercise in selective intelligence sharing, justified by partners on the basis of information security concerns. In one recent case, a two year investigation was carried out on a planned drug import to Australia from PNG. The investigation involved the Queensland Joint Organised Crime Task Force, which included state and federal policing agencies, and the Australian Federal Police Criminal Assets Confiscation Taskforce in collaboration with the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary (AFP Media 2020). While the investigation resulted in the seizure of over 500 kilograms of cocaine in PNG and prosecutions of people involved, it is unclear how much intelligence sharing took place in practice, given concerns about intelligence being leaked to PNG elites with criminal connections (Vaka'uta 2020). Additionally, challenges arise when governmental organisations – such as police services – make use of generic yahoo or gmail accounts which may lack security features needed by organisations working with sensitive information. For PICTs, adopting measures to improve the security of communications would help to facilitate more equitable information – and intelligence sharing arrangements.

Although transnational and organised crime has often been regarded in PICTs as part of an externally driven policing agenda (McLeod 2009), some evidence suggests it is increasingly part of an internally recognised agenda by PICTs. For example, following discussions at the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police Meeting in Nauru in August 2018, the Transnational, Serious and Organised Crime (TSOC) Pacific Taskforce was launched in February 2019, through the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the

Australian Federal Police, New Zealand Police, Fiji Police Force, and Tonga Police. The purpose of the TSOC Pacific Taskforce is to increase targeting capabilities, improve sharing of operational intelligence, and strengthen cooperation to conduct expanded and complex investigations. The TSOC goals include enhancing information sharing between participants of the PTCN, PTCCC, and respective TCUs (AFP 2019). Fiji has also signed a memorandum of understanding with Indonesia's Narcotics Bureau to facilitate intelligence sharing – building on earlier agreements with Indonesia to provide training and information sharing (Kumar 2020).

## Pacific specific capacity

Organisational capacity to respond to transnational and organised crime varies in PICTs, with some countries more reliant than others on support from external partners (Watson 2020). Many smaller countries across the region lack the capacity to conduct investigations and intelligence gathering, and some outlying islands and villages have limited immediate access to local police (Boswell 2010). Limited capacity for maritime surveillance, a dearth of technology to facilitate crime detection, and a lack of exposure to new and emerging crimes also leads to reliance on external bodies to compensate for shortfalls in skill sets.

Police capacity development programs have been ongoing in PICTs for many years. These programs have primarily involved deployments of Australian and New Zealand police to PICTs to act in an advisory capacity or work alongside Pacific police to develop leadership skills and deliver general and specialised education and training. Large scale programs, such as the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), have also included police from fellow PICTs (Putt et al. 2018). Smaller targeted programs have been facilitated by the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police along with initiatives led by New Zealand Police – such as Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Programme (PPDVP), Partnership for Pacific Policing (3P) – and initiatives led by Australian Federal Police such as Pacific Police Development Program-Regional (PPDP-R), Cyber Safety Pasifika and the Pacific Forensic Working Group. In 2019, New Zealand deployed additional police officers to provide training and technical assistance as part of a New Zealand–Tonga–Australia jointly funded program to combat transnational crime. The Australian Defence Force has a Pacific Maritime Security Program, which includes the provision of 21 new patrol boats to PICTs (and Timor-Leste) and integrated regional aerial surveillance (Department of Defence 2018). Training support is also provided in the form of specialist senior officers working with local officers in-country, and officers travelling to China for specialist training (Kumar 2018).

Responding to transnational and organised crime requires organisational commitment to current as well as anticipated threats. At times, an external focus on transnational and organised crime has not reflected the needs identified within PICTs (McLeod 2009, Watson 2020) and strained resources necessitate that priority is given to immediate threats and/or to adjusting to external

stakeholder or government imposed priorities (Watson 2020). Natural disasters such as cyclones and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, have revealed the level of organisational agility required. With scarce resources, it is not surprising that for some Pacific countries, addressing immediate needs takes precedence over engaging in organisational planning and preparation, particularly if threats are deemed comparatively low risk. However, a lack of planning and preparation can impact the establishment of bilateral and multilateral agreements; result in cooperation imbalances; and impede the development of contingency measures (Department of Defense 2019, Watson and Dinnen 2020, Watson 2020). Notably, Fiji, Tonga, and Papua New Guinea are actively deploying resources to address high risk threats to the region.

The issue of conflicting priorities between aid donor and recipient countries also presents challenges for police organisations (Dinnen and Peake 2013, Law and Development Partnership 2013). These include a lack of flexibility to adapt to local needs and contexts, the imposition of external political priorities, and a lack of autonomy and control for local recipients. Police in PICTs must simultaneously navigate their organisations capacity development priorities and donor and political sensitivities (Allen 2006, Boswell 2010, ANU Enterprise 2007, Cox et al. 2012). Collaborative approaches and mutual agreement on the aims of police development programs and how their achievement will be measured is essential, although it is inherently complex (Peake and Dinnen 2014).

On the one hand, PICTs benefit from international assistance through training and upskilling of staff to respond to transnational and organised crime (Australian Federal Police 2016). On the other hand, the challenges of identifying the most suitable people for these training opportunities, retention of trained employees, and local opportunities to use these new skills complicate national efforts. Smaller countries may find it more feasible to depend on external support to compensate for shortfalls in their resources – compounding their reliance on foreign capacity while maintaining a low level of local capacity. It may be more useful in the longer term to invest in local capacity development, despite a lack of perceived immediate need. This issue is, however, complex because limited local resources must often be diverted to address immediately pressing issues. The complexity of addressing transnational and organised crime, coupled with the resourcing and geographical constraints in the Pacific region, combine to make a strong case for regional approaches.

## Conclusion

Regional capacity building for transnational and organised crime must align with the needs of police organisations, and recognise the nuances of current capacities and constraints. Regional collaboration requires honest and open dialogue at national and regional levels. Capacity development discussions with larger partners – such as Australia – need to be clear about how the resources for building capacity to respond to transnational crime will impact on operational capacity in other areas. These discussions need to be



culturally appropriate and context specific, recognising the differences within and between PICTs.

Financial resources and feasibility issues continue to loom as deterrents to improving existing, or developing new, prevention and response capacity. Corruption and the potential for political gain from organised crime loom large (Watson and Dinnen 2020). Essential to addressing crime effectively, is a long term vision, planning that involves key stakeholders with a focus on local stakeholders, and co-ordination of efforts across agencies. Understanding the complexity and nuances of these challenges is a necessary starting point for making further inroads into the capacity development and collaboration needed to address transnational and organised crime in the Pacific region. This understanding is a starting point for thinking about ways to explore contingency measures and develop stronger bilateral and multilateral agreements on mutual legal assistance and regional law enforcement cooperation.

A wealth of regional forums such as the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police (PICP) already exist, along with other regional bodies with a vested interest in protecting the Pacific from transnational and organisational crime threats. The idea of Pacific-led demand for capacity development at the regional level – within existing networks that facilitate resource sharing – is at the heart of improving regional response capabilities. These regional organisations enable the necessary dialogue at both national and organisational levels by way of existing platforms. Key elements of success in bolstering the capacity of local law enforcement to address crime threats will build greater linkages between Pacific law enforcement and other relevant agencies and build the necessary supporting systems within the health, education, and social service sectors to support communities and individuals.

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# Solomon Islands' long summer of discontent: Security challenges

*Anouk Ride, The Australian National University*

## Rising temperatures: Conflict factors

It is the last quarter of 2023 and the Solomon Islands is unbearably hot. The road into East Guadalcanal is blocked by locals hurtling rocks at cars, particularly government-plated and Asian-driven vehicles, in protest of a regional land dispute. Key services are now unmanned due to a planned protest by public servants in Honiara objecting to delayed pay and entitlements. A volunteer midwife service pops up to deal with women who are now unable to give birth in a hospital or clinic, while teachers' attendance in schools is low and affecting the number of students able to graduate. Meanwhile, the government blames the global economic downturn for increases in opportunistic theft and the numbers of people begging for money around the main shops and markets in town. Parliament has only been in session twice in 2023, both times to approve increased entitlements for Members of Parliament (MPs) and discretionary funding. The business sector bemoans a backlog of needed reforms, unpaid government contracts, and rising taxes and duties.

A male youth is accidentally killed by a logging truck, and he is from a family that was evicted from the land that the logging company now owns. The company also runs a hotel where it is widely known prostitution and sales of illegal drugs occur, but those responsible so far have evaded arrest and prosecutions. The Prime Minister, who is closely allied with the logging company and whose son in law is on the Board, states that the 2023 election will be delayed due to the hosting of the South Pacific Games and the economic effects of COVID-19. Locals attack the logging company premises, and people who have previously hurtled rocks at cars now advance on the first foreign owned premises they can find in East Guadalcanal and loot and destroy goods. Local security guards abscond from their posts at the Asian-owned casino hotel hosting a meeting of current MPs, and soon security guards around other Asian-owned businesses follow suit, with a few forming their own groups and offering 'security' services for the highest paying businesses. The civil conflict some people call the 'second tensions' begins.

The above 2023 scenario is of course hypothetical, but each element of this scenario is based in causes of conflict in 2020. The civil conflict in Solomon Islands from 1998–2003, known as 'the tensions', was one which while small in fatalities (around 200) was great in its impacts on development. Solomon Islands is ranked 153 out of 189 countries (UNDPa 2018), according to the 2019 UNDP human development index (HDI). The conflict also had a toll for neighbouring Australia, ultimately leading the Australian Government to fund a regional security intervention for disarmament and 'restoration' of law and order at a cost of \$2.6 billion AUD (Hayward-Jones 2014).

## 2020

It is 2020 and Solomon Islands is sweating, because of the effects of the global economic downturn following COVID-19. Government responses to the pandemic, including lockdowns prior to the arrival of any case of COVID-19 in the country, budget cuts, and redirections, have contributed to the turmoil. Increased discretionary spending by Members of Parliament of government funds allocated for agriculture, health and natural disasters, are paid for by cuts across the board to ministry budgets. Working people buy less food and grow or harvest more food themselves, worrying that restricted imports and government controls on informal markets will mean that they will not be able to feed their families. Those in rural areas find themselves often hosting more people in their homes and on their land as people return due to school closures and job losses. Land tenure reforms mean that many squatters are evicted, which adds to population pressures on already overcrowded areas of the city and peri-urban areas.

While to date COVID-19 cases have been confined to quarantine, the country has operated under a State of Emergency since 25 March with severe economic repercussions. The informal marketing sector, which provides the only source of household income for more than 80 per cent of vendors (Keen & Ride 2018), suffered erratic closures at the start of the year and at the end of the year the government announces its intent to suspend Facebook, despite its prominent use by small and large businesses for sales and promotions.

With many losing formal jobs in industry and pay from civil service positions, the importance of informal incomes gained through markets or online marketing becomes even greater. A survey of 100 businesses by the Solomon Islands Chamber of Commerce and Industry in May finds 55 of them have laid off staff or are planning to lay off workers, and 34 per cent of these have to lay off more than 40 per cent of their workforce. By July, 34 per cent of survey respondents say their business situation had worsened (SICCI2020).

Essential services have also faced disruptions with schools closing for eight weeks, followed by suspensions at early childhood education centers. Nurses state they have overdue pay and unpaid entitlements (the nurses' union that raised this issue was then suspended by the government, with an official release claiming that their sit-in was illegal according to the Procession and Public Assemblies Act and provisions of the State of Emergency).

Transparency of budget spending is lower than in 2019, in part due to the unusual situation of COVID-19, increased funding to some areas under the State of Emergency (SOE), as well as the centralisation of power, and lack of government oversight. Local residents are inquiring whether the government coffers are in fact empty and the treasury is

drawing on reserves, and who actually received ‘economic stimulus package’ funding of SBD\$300 million. How much have Members of Parliament received in discretionary funding and how it has been spent? The Prime Minister’s Office meanwhile, staffed largely by political appointees (who are not subject to hiring and performance standards of public servants), manages a budget of SBD\$71 million in development expenditure for 2020, as well as stimulus package funding.

Communications are regular, with the Prime Minister making weekly or even more regular announcements, and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services providing daily social media updates on cases of COVID-19 and quarantine issues. However, confusion has also been rife at certain points. In the first lockdown on 10 April 2020, 63 people were arrested for breaching curfews imposed during the lockdown, but their cases were later thrown out because of incorrect procedures. Confusing statements were made about what time the lockdown started and stopped. Communication about the economic stimulus package also suffers from lack of clarity, with some potential applicants being told they needed to have a registered business and several documents, and others being told this was not necessary. Criticism of the government and swearing about officials on social media leads government to bring forward plans for legislation on internet use, and Cabinet to announce in November its intent to suspend Facebook.

Meanwhile, several disputes simmer between provincial governments and the national political coalition. The most populous of the provinces, Malaita, has been in disagreement with the federal government over the decision to switch diplomatic relations from Taiwan to China in September 2019, and over the Malaita Provincial Government’s call for greater autonomy in its affairs. In response, various operators affiliated with the Prime Minister’s Office and Malaitan MPs supporting the national governing coalition, have threatened to recall the Provincial Permanent Secretary; held up a donation of personal protective equipment (PPE) from Taiwanese groups; questioned the legitimacy of USAID given to Malaita for its agriculture sector; and allegedly offered bribes of SBD\$10,000 to members of the Provincial Assembly to overturn the Malaitan Premier (which was voted down 24 votes against and 9 in support).

However, it is not just Malaita Provincial Government that has called for increased autonomy. Most of the large provinces have had substantive disagreements with the national government in 2020. In September, the Western Province Premier called for government reform to recognise greater power for the provinces and threatened to take court action if the government passed a bill that takes discretion from the provinces and formally centralises power. Even Guadalcanal Province has complained about the unfair burden of national government decisions about COVID-19 including extending the emergency zone beyond the city to the province without proper consultation, and proposing the province run quarantine and COVID-19 testing centers when they have neither funding nor capacity to do so.

The rising influence of the provinces and public airing of their grievances is a trend that has taken sections of the development sector by surprise. Provincial government

staff used to complain about the lack of visits or consultations from international NGOs to their offices, whereas in 2020, it seems a photo opportunity between the Premier of Malaita or Premier of Makira and an international NGO has become a far more regular occurrence. Previous aid projects that only worked at the national level now also work directly at the provincial level.

While this might be new for some development actors, local conflict researchers have long pointed to the need for a system of sharing power between the national government and the provinces in order to prevent conflict. The Solomon Islands Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has referred to many reports advocating a form of decentralised power and state governance and concludes that:

none of these reports has made their way to a political agenda that would satisfy the demands of the Guadalcanal leaders for state government; this is the case until now... The Guadalcanal ex-combatants highlighted this potential for future conflict time and time again during the public hearing on 11 and 12 May 2011’ (TRC 2013:57).

Guadalcanal being driven by and largely benefitting national politicians and structures was one of the motivations for violence by militants and their political supporters in the previous armed conflict.

While there are no such organised militant groups in 2020, there is an increase in the popularity of provincial governments ‘opting out’ of national government in anticipation of being more economically self-sufficient (with support from donor funded projects). Bougainville’s move towards independence and the election of its government is watched closely in Solomon Islands, with a degree of both admiration and anxiety about whether an independent Bougainville can ensure security and peace. During the Solomon Islands conflict, and in Bougainville’s own civil war, violent incidents involving Bougainvilleans in Solomon Islands occurred and the border between both countries remains quite porous, open to trade of both legal goods, such as canned fish and fresh produce, and illegal goods, including weapons during times of conflict.

The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force is stretched thin responding to crime not to mention complicated issues such as weapons smuggling or the burning down of the Civil Aviation Authority in July and the Aola police post in October. Meanwhile, violence against women and girls – the most commonly experienced form of violence in the Solomon Islands – is more likely to be ignored than prosecuted. A review of 107 women who went to the police last year found that in 60 per cent of cases, women were given no information and there was no action. Only 43 per cent of visits eventually resulted in a Police Safety Notice or court case (Ride & Soaki 2019).

The economic pressures of COVID-19 have doubled efforts by loggers and miners to extract and export natural resources. Tubi tree logs, a rare species banned from export, were again found this year and impounded; however, the company involved was merely fined and is still allowed to log and propose new mining activities. Logging companies seldom pay the applicable fees due to exemptions awarded by allies in government, others simply do not pay due to a

lack of respect for the provincial authorities, which in turn do not punish noncompliance. For instance, in Malaita in 2016, outstanding logging fees totaled SBD\$4 million with only 30 per cent of active logging companies paying their license fees (Minter et al 2016). This situation has been corrected under the current Malaita provincial government, which has reduced logging and required all operators to pay fees; however, in other provinces, practices such as not paying fees, or paying with bags of rice or other commodities rather than cash continues in 2020. Sexual abuse of young girls and women by loggers and miners is a frequent if underreported occurrence.

Meanwhile, in 2020 landowners resisting proposals to mine in Choiseul, Isabel, Western Province and Temotu have the odds stacked against them. For local landowners to take an issue to court they would have to hire a lawyer for several appearances – a process and cost beyond the capacity and financial resources of rural people, the majority of whom are subsistence farmers and fishers. The few cases where logging or mining has been resisted by landowners tend to be those with access to legal aid or overseas support. There is currently no accessible legal aid system in Solomon Islands (the current Public Solicitors Office civil division has a staff of only four). The continued presence of extractive natural resource companies with poor records on environmental and social responsibility or abiding by the law will lead to future conflicts.

In 2020, Solomon Islands is in a long summer of discontent. This summer heat will lead to spot fires of violence in 2023. In three years an election will be due, and elections and political transitions are a time for symbolic violence (Ride, 2019). The temperatures have risen in this long summer because of discontent about foreign extraction of and benefit from natural resources, housing insecurity, lack of economic opportunity for indigenous people and businesses, youth unemployment and exclusion, failure of government services to meet basic needs of education and health, corruption, growing food insecurity, land disputes, mistrust of and dissatisfaction with police, and a system of governance that centralises power within a mere 100 people or so (the governing coalition MPs and their political appointees) rather than sharing it with those representing a predominantly rural population in the provinces.

## Prospects for peace

Local actors on the ground are indeed planting and maintaining greenery that can lower the temperature in certain areas. These actors include chiefs and women leaders, who are responsible for local conflict resolution in Solomon Islands, but have varying levels of legitimacy and agency (with some local leaders respected and active, and others who serve as ‘chief’ in name only but have no capacity to solve conflict). The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force Crime Prevention Strategy builds on these local actors to form crime prevention committees that are reducing local crime in urban and rural areas. Social media and groups like Yumi Toktok Forum and Transparency International have provided forums to uncover information and discuss issues, which helps people let off steam and provides an outlet to expose cover-ups and other illicit behaviour. The provincial

government’s role as frontline actors in solving conflicts (see Phillips 2020) has become more pronounced with COVID-19, and their moves towards financial autonomy will strengthen their role in peacebuilding.

However, rain from the sky, in the form of aid from the national government and its key source of funding – donors – is also needed to cool down the conflict factors. Police reform, particularly establishing an easy-to-use complaints mechanism staffed by active and independent researchers and prosecutors that would make the force able to cleanse itself of corrupt officers, inactive officers and those with gender biases that prevent them acting on every crime, will restore public trust in police. Free legal aid and support for local communities, as a first step to introducing more social and environmental responsibility into the mining and logging sectors, is also desperately required. Increased donor funding for a range of actors – civil society, provincial government, indigenous-run businesses, youth groups, women’s groups – can help provide alternative sources of power that can both increase calls for accountability and provide new potential political candidates and coalitions to influence the next governing coalition beyond 2023. Although fatigued by many conflict issues, these ‘cooling agents’ are all around us, supporting peace in Solomon Islands while watching for signs of rain that may help them survive.

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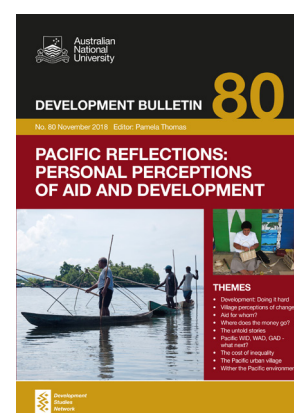
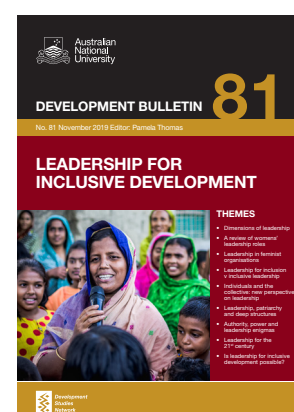
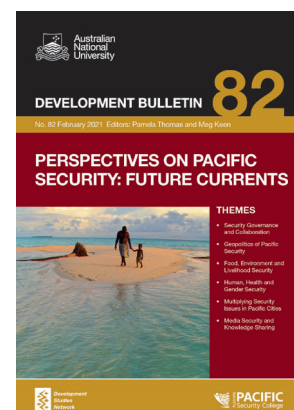
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**Contact**

Dr Pamela Thomas

Development Studies Network  
Resources, Environment and  
Development (RMAP)  
Crawford School of Public Policy  
The Australian National University  
Canberra ACT 2600, Australia

T 61 2 6125 8257

E [pamela.thomas@anu.edu.au](mailto:pamela.thomas@anu.edu.au)



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